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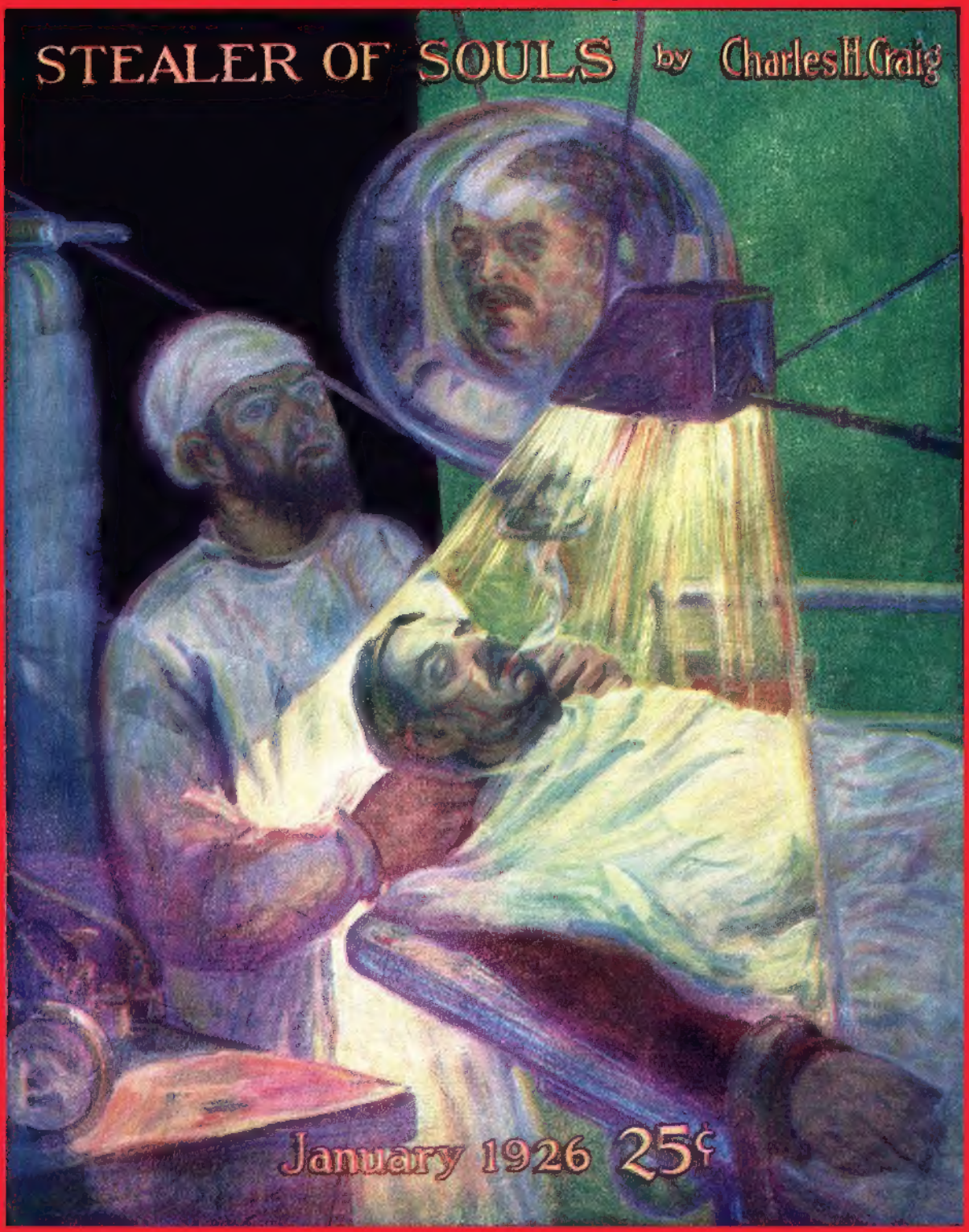

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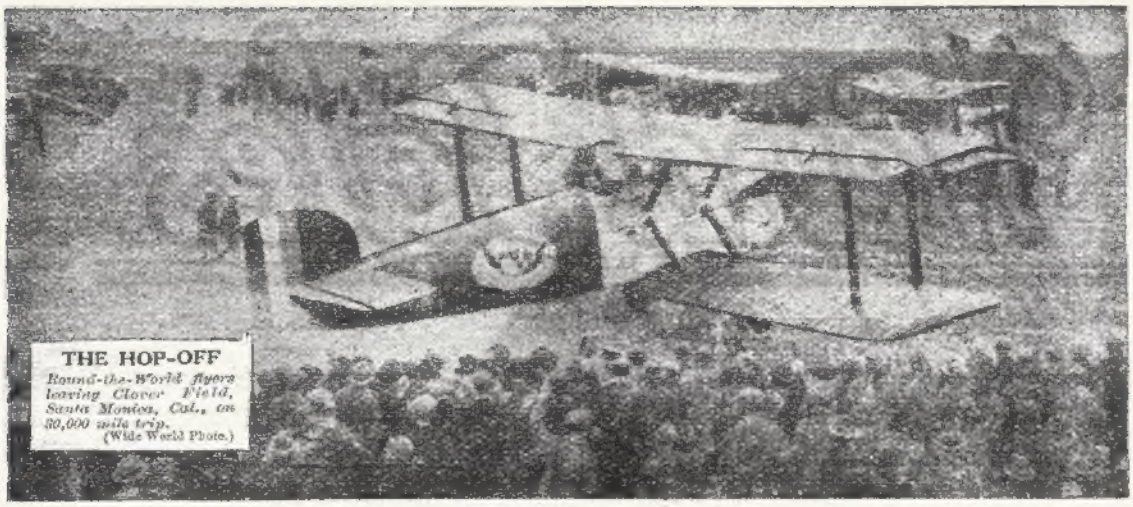

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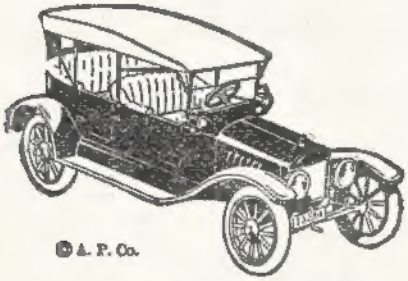

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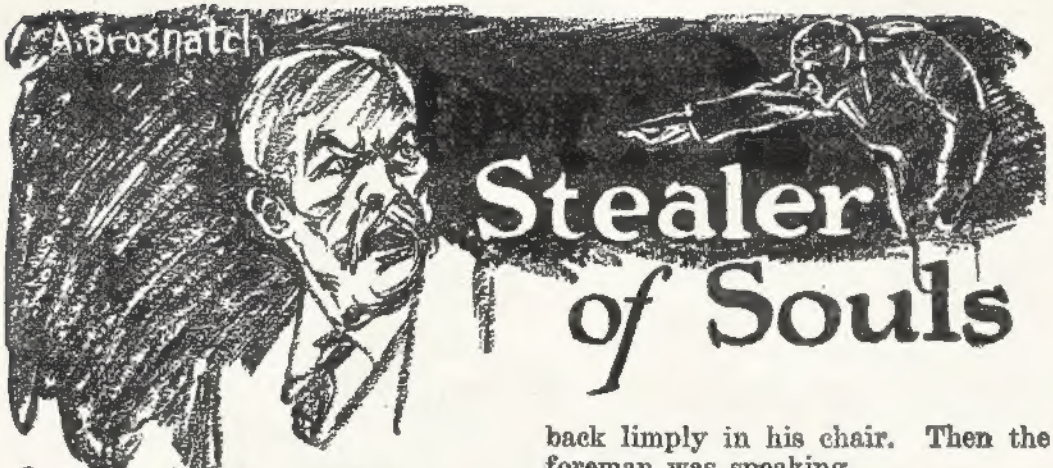


Stealer of Souls

by Charles Hilan Craig

1. *THE CURSE OF THE HUNCHBACK*

THE hunchback leaned forward a little in his chair. His sharp gray eyes seemed to change to a steely blue as he waited. His shoulders sagged a little, for the trial had been long and he was tired. But there was a vivid interest in every line of his brutal face as he listened. The case had been as brilliant as it was long. And now the jury had filed back into the room, led by the gaunt Jason Andrews, mayor of the city of Caledonia, in one of the Western states. Harshly the hunchback jerked his deformed body to keep out of sight any nervousness which might possess him as he waited for the clerk to propound the question to the jury.

It came. The foreman was rising to his feet. He rose a little stiffly, but withal, gladly, now that an irksome duty was almost over. A moment he stood there, and involuntarily his eyes sought the face of the prisoner at the bar. The gaze of the hunchback met his. He seemed to feel what was coming, for with one glare of malevolent hatred he sank back limply in his chair. Then the foreman was speaking.

"We find the prisoner guilty"—his pause was painful—"guilty of murder in the first degree!"

The pale face of the hunchback went whiter still as he looked up at the judge. His long, slender fingers gripped the table's edge. His ugly body sank low in his chair. Then the bailiff was prodding him. He was on his feet. He glared about the courtroom, fiercely. He danced up and down. But he was not a tragic figure in his agony; someone laughed, then another; the courtroom rippled with laughter for a moment while the judge rapped for order.

The hunchback cursed bitterly. Not even in such a place as this, then, could his tragedy be appreciated. A moment. Then he stood at the bar of judgment. He swayed there as the judge adjusted his glasses, turned ponderously to the front.

The judge spoke slowly, almost kindly, as his tired eyes looked down on the prisoner.

"You have heard the verdict of the jury. Have you anything to say before sentence is pronounced upon you?"

The prisoner knew what was coming. This particular judge had always sentenced murderers to life in the penitentiary unless the jury had specifically recommended the death penalty. The hunchback knew that he must spend the balance of his days

behind the gray rock walls of the state's prison. His life!

He swayed a moment before the judge. There came to him one second of terrific, vivid introspection. Someone has said that one who is dying thinks back over his whole life in just a few seconds. And surely something is dying in a man during that awful instant before he is sentenced to a living death. Memories came to the hunchback . . . . bitter memories. . . .

ROLF JAEKE had not been a cripple at birth, in fact for twenty-two years he had led a perfectly normal life save for the fact that he was an amateur thief. For some reason he could not keep his hands from those things which belonged to others, but which he coveted. He had distinctly a bad reputation and before he was twenty had been in jail several times for petty thefts.

Then came the accident which made him the hopeless cripple he would always be. That had been his own fault, the result of the freakish daring which always characterized his exploits; but he stopped only to think of the cruelty of the world against him; he gave little credit to the people who gave much that he might have the best of care; he only cursed them because they could not do more for him.

And so the years passed by, twelve of them, and bitter became the growing canker in the heart of Rolf the hunchback. Little by little, because of his mean and despicable nature, the people who might have helped him drew away. Little by little he killed the pity in the hearts of his fellow citizens, till they passed him by as they might a loathsome serpent.

Left much to himself he turned to the things of which the world as a whole knows little. He became a student of psychology; a follower of the movements of the stars; and it was whispered about that he was a believer in the theory of reincarnation—the transmigration of the soul. Too, it was whispered that the house in which he lived had witnessed many tragedies—that it was haunted by the ghosts of dead animals, perhaps dead persons.

His first imprisonment came as the result of his study of souls. They found him in his place one day very calmly chiseling the skull from the head of a living dog while the animal howled in agony. He was bent over the little table to which the dog was strapped, very intent on his operation. Later he told them he was waiting for the dog's soul to leave; that he had a glass container in which to catch the soul when it should leave. What he was going to do with it he never told; but he was a raging demon when they took him away to jail. Thereafter for many months he spent his days in the gray prison and had time only to *think* of souls.

When he returned to Caledonia he had changed but little, though his hair was a bit more gray, his face more lined. He went back to the haunted cabin at the edge of town and lived there. The place had been occupied only once since his departure, then by a family of four. They had lived there a week, and when they left were on the verge of nervous prostration. Of course some of the things they told were discounted; for who could believe that each night at 10 a tiny little figure of a man who would shriek in a wailing voice that he was the soul of Rolf Jaeke would leap grotesquely up and down on the mantelpiece? And who could believe that at the same hour there would come over the head of the family a terrible desire to mutilate the dog; or that one night he prepared to cut open his daughter's head to find her soul? That is too improbable to believe; but nevertheless the family left the house, and it got the

reputation of being haunted. Thereafter it was shunned as a thing of the devil—evil.

But Rolf Jaeke returned to the house and lived there, apparently in peace and quiet. No more were howls of animals heard from the place, but whenever a dog disappeared men would say, "The hunchback's got him." Or when a child was particularly bad one sometimes heard, "It's the soul of old Jaeke that's possessing him." You can conjecture from this what an unsavory reputation the man had.

But it was several years later that the hunchback got into trouble again. That was the cause of his big trial.

The body of young Andy Raymond had been found in a bunch of weeds nearly half a mile from the cabin, and at first the death was not associated with the hunchback. Young Andy was a rather worthless character who spent most of his time dreaming. Gradually the warp and woof of the law brought the two together. There was the testimony of the man who had seen the young fellow—who was known to be a student of the occult—in the cabin of the hunchback. The fellow who had heard harsh words between them. Other things. Gradually the finger of suspicion began to point to the hunchback as a mass of circumstantial evidence was woven about him. There came the Indian with his wolf dog who said he could follow any trail ever made. He started from the body and the trail led by a devious, seldom-used route to the back door of the hunchback's cabin. They still had Rolf there under guard. When the wolf approached the prisoner, the bristles rose on his neck. His eyes glared fearfully for a moment; then his tail dropped, his head went down, with a moaning howl he fled the house.

The Indian paused for a moment in alarm. Then he spoke grimly, his voice tinged with fear. "Devil man," he said. "Devil soul. Do not like." He left the house and the town, nor was he seen again.

But on the strength of what they had found the hunchback was taken to trial. He had some money and his lawyers dragged the ordeal out, but presently there was no more to be said and done, and the case went to the jury. I have told you already of their verdict.

ROLF JAEKE thought of all these things as he stood at the judgment bar. He was guilty—he knew that. He was glad of it—and the boy wasn't the first he had killed in his mad struggle for knowledge of the human soul. But his half-crazed brain told him there was no justice in this thing which they called law. He could see nothing righteous in the solemn face of the judge who looked down upon him. He could see no desire for justice in the wildly gesticulating prosecuting attorney. He saw only cold hatred in the faces of the twelve men in the jury box. He hated them—he knew that. And he thought of all these things in that mad second before he answered the judge.

"Have you anything to say?" repeated the judge.

The body of the hunchback stiffened. His head raised as high as was possible from his twisted shoulders. He spoke in a low, terrible voice—so low that only the first rows of spectators might hear him.

"Guilty? Ay, sure I'm guilty. I killed him. And I had a right to kill, for I killed for knowledge. I killed to find out something. And I found out, too. You have no right to sentence me——"

The judge rapped wearily on the desk. The bailiff stepped forward to take the prisoner by the arm, but he jerked loose, screaming.

"Judge, you dare not sentence me! You dare not! If you do, by the liv-

ing God judge and jury shall die! Every one! Yes, and the district attorney! Fourteen men! You shall all pay!"

The bailiff shook him fiercely.

Slowly the judge removed his spectacles. He had heard tirades such as this before, and he was unmoved. He wiped his glasses. He pronounced sentence, ponderously.

"—imprisoned for the duration of your natural life."

The prisoner had torn loose again. A policeman gripped his arm. He struggled fiercely. He screamed:

"This is the curse of your hunchback. One by one you shall pay! Fourteen men! You shall all pay! One by one! One by one!"

He tore loose for a second from his captors. He strode up and down in his rage. Bloody froth foamed from his lips. But the bolder spectators laughed. The moment of fearful suspense passed, they saw only a deformed little man leaping up and down—for all the world like a monkey on a stick. They laughed as the policeman bore him to the door, but their laughter froze as the man's ugly head turned toward them.

"You too," he said. "You too, later!"

The courtroom was stilled. Back to the people from the corridor came the screaming curse of the hunchback:

"Fourteen men. One by one, in agony, in horror! One by one!"

They no longer laughed. An eery silence suddenly came upon them, a mood of melancholy, which they could not fathom.

Quietly the people left the courtroom.

2. *THE MAYOR BECOMES A MURDERER*

JASON ANDREWS had been mayor of the little city of Caledonia for six years prior to the time the curse of the hunchback fell on him as foreman of the jury which convicted the cripple of murder. If ever a man enjoyed the absolute trust and love of his fellow men, that person was Jason Andrews. For twenty years he had lived in Caledonia, and those twenty years were a clean record of strict honesty. He was generous in every good sense of the word, a loyal churchman, a good citizen, and a true friend of those who deserved his friendship.

The mayor had served several times on juries, for the good reason that he liked jury duty. His work as mayor did not require a great deal of his time, and as he had given up his active law practise he felt that it was his duty to serve on the juries for which he was called.

Jason Andrews did not like the "hunchback case," as it came to be called. His big heart held only pity for the deformed human who had murdered a man to find his soul. But as proof mounted on proof, showing that the hunchback was guilty of a colossal crime, the sole excuse for which seemed to be his desire for knowledge, he could do no other than declare him guilty. Though he was sorry for the man, he realized that he must pay his awful debt to society. He voted him guilty of murder in the first degree in each of the five ballots taken.

The curse of the hunchback did not have a great effect on the equanimity of the mayor. He had heard many threats before in his life, although none like this. The threat did not bother him much, because he could not see how a person in prison with no known friends could hurt him. No life prisoner had ever been known to escape from that particular prison. An empty threat, thought the mayor. But even as he thought, he little knew that he was to be the first man to pay the debt the hunchback alleged the world owed him. But pay he did.

The mayor's punishment began with a series of hideous dreams, the like of which he had never conceived. These dreams usually woke him within a couple of hours after he had retired in the evening. The strange thing about these dreams was that he always thought he was another person—in fact that he was Rolf Jaeke. The mayor would invariably waken from his nightmare cold with sweat, sick to the core. Later he would go downstairs to prepare a hot lemonade to drink before retiring again. Night after night these terrible illusions came to him—always he was in the form of the hunchback committing some particularly awful and fiendish crime.

This went on for perhaps a month, the mayor getting weaker and weaker all the time from the fright given him by the repeated attacks. Why they came to him he could not understand. He had not wronged the hunchback: he had simply done his duty as he had sworn to when he went on the jury. Nor had he been worrying about the case, for he felt there was nothing to worry about. The hunchback had been justly punished for a great crime, and that was all there was to it.

But gradually the cheerful look went out of the face of the mayor and he became short in speech and action. His face had lined in one brief month, and the ruddy color left his cheeks. People noticed, but he gave them no reason. Day after day the hallucinations continued. Finally the mayor went to his good friend Dr. Anderson and told him frankly just what the trouble was. The doctor accused him of thinking overtime on the late case; advised him to get more sleep and showed him out.

But sleep came hard for Mayor Andrews thereafter. Each night he knew that the specter form of the hunchback would appear in his mind. He knew that he would seem to be the hunchback himself, knew that he would commit in a dream some dastardly crime, and awake to find it all a vision. Then he would get his glass of hot lemonade, and sleep after several restless hours.

But on the first day of March the dream changed a little. And with the change came disaster.

JASON ANDREWS went to bed with his usual dread of what was to follow, and finally dozed off to sleep. This time the hunchback came and crawled astride his shoulders, made him walk down the street and slay a man in cold blood.

On this particular March first, Jason Andrews woke from his sleep screaming. He was standing on the floor in the middle of his room. He passed a restless hand over his face; convinced himself that it had been a dream; went downstairs for the usual drink.

But it so happened that the furnace had gone out and the water was cold. While he waited for water to heat in the little pan which he placed over a gas jet he walked restlessly into the library and tried to make himself comfortable in a large chair. Presently he dozed off to sleep. Then began the terrible series of incidents which led up to a somber and much talked-of tragedy in which the mayor seemed to play the principal part.

Jason Andrews had been asleep in his chair for perhaps ten minutes when he awoke suddenly. As he rose to his feet there surged up within his brain the thought that he was no longer a benefactor of mankind, the thought that somewhere in the world was a man whom he must destroy. He did not stop to think of the hunchback: he had no time to decide whether or not he was hypnotized. All he knew was that an overpowering something in his being told him that Glenn Keith must die.

The mayor did not pause to reason *why* Glenn Keith was to die. He knew that it was inevitable.

Glenn Keith was a politician, and one of the few men in Caledonia who was not a friend of the mayor. In fact he had tried to win that office at the last three elections, but in each case Andrews had defeated him by a safe margin. Keith was the sort of man who holds grudges for a long time, and it was well known that he had made many sly digs at the chief officer of the city. But Jason Andrews was well known as being too big a man to take notice of sly slap and insidious innuendo; but, too, it was well known that he despised Glenn Keith as one might despise a particularly vile beast.

This, then, was the man for whom Jason Andrews felt his sudden killing antipathy.

The mayor was very calm in what he did. He walked up the stairs and donned a street suit and light overcoat. He returned to the library and took from the drawer of the table a small revolver. This he slipped into his coat pocket as he let himself out of the side door.

As he walked along the street no warning voice of conscience rose up within to tell him to turn about and thus save himself from becoming a murderer. His soul, it seemed, was dead—unless that could be his soul which was urging him on toward the place where he would find the man he now knew to be his bitter foe.

He knew about where he would find Glenn Keith. The latter was a devotee of the night life and at about this time would be prowling about one of the downtown pool halls. He walked along, the weapon firmly gripped in his right hand inside the coat pocket, his head thrust forward antagonistically, his nostrils dilated as though he could smell out the man he hated from all the world.

Jason Andrews was seldom seen on the streets late at night, so there was some surprize when he walked into hall after hall, looked about carefully and went on. Several acquaintances spoke to him on the street and he answered them even more abruptly than had been his way the past few weeks. They frowned a little and went on their various ways while the mayor of Caledonia continued his search for the man he was going to murder. *Murder,* he thought. That wasn't a nice name for a thing—but this man deserved to be murdered.

Occasionally he stopped someone to ask a terse question.

"Seen anything of Glenn Keith tonight?" or "I'm looking for Keith. Have you seen him?"

For a time no one had—then Dr. Linn came along and enlightened him.

"Keith? Sure, he's over at the Red Circle. But I thought you and he were on the outs. What do you want of him, mayor?"

"I am going to kill him," said the mayor of Caledonia in a low, quiet voice.

The doctor laughed.

"I can't conceive of your killing anything, Jason—let alone a man. I suppose you mean you're going to kill his chances in the election next month. That it?"

"I am going to kill Glenn Keith," said the mayor in a dull, dead voice.

The doctor was startled out of his usual calm.

"Are you ill, Andrews?" Dr. Linn never called a man by his last name unless his talk was thoroughly professional.

"I am not ill," said the mayor, "And I do not wish to talk with you. Go on about your business!"

Dr. Linn was amazed. Never before had the mayor spoken to him in such a tone as this. He was imme-

diately convinced that something was vitally wrong somewhere. He gripped the mayor by the arm.

"Come with me," he said. "Come, Jason, I'll take you home."

The dull voice of the mayor intoned monotonously: "No, I'm going to kill Glenn Keith."

The street showed no sign of a mutual friend, and the doctor disliked to call on a stranger to aid him save as a last resort.

"Come!" he said, and gripped the arm fiercely.

Then happened a thing which was well-nigh unbelievable in Caledonia. The mayor raised his fist and drove it into the face of Dr. Linn fiercely. The surgeon staggered back and fell dizzily to the sidewalk. When he had risen the mayor was gone.

Jason Andrews continued his search for the man he was going to kill. He came presently to the Red Circle café and walked in. He looked about. Through the haze of cigarette smoke he saw his enemy.

Glenn Keith but added to the horror of the situation. He saw the mayor and smiled.

"Ah!" in a sarcastic tone. "The mayor is here to get the dope on our bootleggers."

Jason Andrews looked upon the man with dull eyes. His brain for a moment was filled with wonder that he was not afraid—that he had no horror of shooting down a man in cold blood. He looked at the fellow without venom, without malice. For a moment he stood there. Then he said in a low, tense voice:

"Keith, I have come to kill you."

It was not a threat—just the statement of a casual fact.

Keith threw back his leonine head and laughed. He inhaled deeply and blew the smoke toward his challenger. "Shoot," he laughed.

"I am going to kill you," the voice of the mayor was calm as death.

Nearly everyone in the café heard the words this time. The atmosphere became tense. All knew and loved the mayor. They wondered what was to follow. The face of Glenn Keith paled.

The mayor of Caledonia drew the revolver from his pocket, thrust it forward, fired without aiming. The bullet struck Keith in the breast.

The café was in an uproar as a wondering, pained expression came over the face of the victim. The mayor turned—and there was none who stretched forth an arm to detain him as he walked from the room. They were too astounded. Jason Andrews walked toward his home.

It was but a little while later that they came pounding at the door of his house. At first when Jason Andrews woke he thought it had been another dream, but he soon found his mistake. He was in the library—fully clothed. He had full memory of his terrible deed, but now he knew that he had not wanted to do it. Why had he?

The police came in and took him away. There was a trial that lasted a long time—a trial in which his attorneys spoke at length of temporary insanity; a trial in which his spotless character was held up for the world. But murder is murder in Caledonia and presently Jason Andrews was taken in an auto over the twenty-mile road between Caledonia and the state penitentiary. There, by some strange quirk of fate, he was assigned the cell opposite that of the hunchback; and on his first night there he heard a thing which startled him to the core.

The hunchback was jumping up and down in his cell, mouthing gibberish—and then his words became intelligible

"Fourteen men!" he said softly, but none the less fiercely. "Fourteen men! One by one, or two by two! All will pay! Fourteen men, dear mayor—and you are number one!"

3. *THE CASE OF DR. LINN*

THE Case of Dr. Linn, as it came to be called in Caledonia, was startling, to say the least. The doctor, as was set forth in the first chapter, was a small man, calm in a crisis but of a nervous temperament otherwise. He was well known as a surgeon who had been successful in many difficult operations. The doctor had a large practise which paid him a goodly amount, and in the meantime was slowly wearing his life away. It is difficult to say why the doctor served on the jury when he might easily have claimed exemption. Perhaps it was to get away entirely from his work that he accepted his assignment without a protest.

The doctor was perhaps forty years old at the time of this narrative and, as one can well infer, enjoyed a splendid reputation in the city in which he practised. That he was open and above board in all that he did goes without saying. That he would ignore the ethics of his profession for any except the noblest of reasons, if such coincidence is possible, would be a foolish supposition.

The fact that Dr. Linn began to lose case after case did not at first turn patients away from him, but it did bring lines of worry into his face. When he, too, began to dream about the hunchback he had condemned, he began to think that his work was too much and had caused him to begin thinking overtime of his late unpleasant duty.

However, when he saw the hunchback illusion was causing the deaths of several persons through his hands, his calm disappeared and he became much the same as his old friend Jason Andrews had been—abrupt, immersed in thought, silent to taciturnity, terror-stricken within.

Now when his first patients began to die or to recover in a deformed condition due to improper healing of the wounds, Dr. Linn attributed it to nervousness. The strange thing about these operations was that he never felt that he was himself while in the act of performing them. He knew that it was his body; he knew that his brain directed his nimble fingers; but he felt deep within him that some insidious power was directing that brain.

He did not at first attribute this to the hunchback; but later he began to think that this abnormal being had something vitally important to do with the strange results of his work.

Dr. Linn had a night operation to perform occasionally and he found that usually it was this night work that went wrong. He first became truly alarmed after the death of the district attorney.

This official was suddenly stricken with appendicitis. Dr. Linn was called from his bed to take care of the case. He decided that the appendix was broken and that an immediate operation was absolutely necessary.

The doctor felt no different than usual until he had actually begun his work. As his scalpel pierced the iodine-painted skin, he suddenly knew in his heart that he hated the district attorney, nor did he stop to reason why. The two were not friends, nor had they been enemies. A speaking acquaintance existed between them, but that was all.

Nevertheless there burned within the doctor's brain the desire to eliminate this man from the world. As he looked down upon the unconscious lawyer through his mask he wondered why he had never thought of his hatred before. Why, the chap was actually repulsive! And the strangest part of the weird imaginings that filtered through the mind of the doctor was this: he began to believe that the district attorney had committed a great crime against society by send-

ing to the penitentiary a man of the profound genius of the hunchback, Rolf Jaeke.

The doctor completed his work in his usual swift, silent way. But the operation was distinctly not a success. Gangrene set in and three days later the district attorney was dead.

AT THE penitentiary Jason Andrews was awakened from a restless sleep by what seemed an insistent whispering in his ear. He heard a voice speaking in low gutturals; then, after the whispering had urged him to the door—a voice that now filled him with abject fear. The voice was exultant with demoniac joy.

"The district attorney is dead, dead, dead!" chortled the voice. "Number two. Fourteen men—and number two is dead. Fourteen men—and dear Dr. Linn and another are next."

The growl of the guard broke in.

"Can that chatter if ya don't wanta go to the hole!"

And the cell block was quiet as the grave.

DR. LINN realized that he was a murderer. He knew that while seeming in full possession of his faculties he had suddenly conceived a deadly hatred for the district attorney, and that by not doing something that he should have done he had slain the lawyer. He was a murderer just as surely as if he had gone into the street and shot the man down.

But the world did not know. Dr. Linn lost a little of his prestige in the eyes of Caledonia, but none suspected him of crime. He himself could not fathom the mystery of it, but he resolved that, rather than risk killing another, he would abandon the medical profession altogether. This he did, but his conscience would not lie down and rest, but haunted him each hour with the dread ghost of the man whose death lay on his hands.

He had never been much of a drinker, but thereafter he changed greatly. He drank heavily—anything and everything that he could get in this day of prohibition. And slowly the downfall came. In a few short weeks he changed from a dapper doctor of middle age to a sodden, bleary-eyed, miserable wreck of a man. Each day he drank and drank that he might forget the face of the man he had killed; and he could forget; but each time when he had passed a certain stage in his drinking he would vision another thing more terrible than the first. Each time he got into this condition he would seem to see the tiny figure of a humped-up man dancing on the wall—a tiny replica of the hunchback whom he had helped send to prison. Each time the little man would point a long, scrawny finger at him, and say:

"This is my soul come to haunt you. For you sent my body and mind away to prison and they can not get out. But my soul can, and it is going to torture you for imprisoning my body. There is but one way in which you can pay."

And eagerly the doctor would lean forward in misery and fear, saying: "How?"

"There is only one way—only one way."

"Tell me what it is."

"Do you know John Pawl?"

"The editor of the *Daily Mail?* Of course."

"John Pawl was on the jury which sent my body and brain to a living death. *I want the soul of John Pawl.*"

Each time the sentence would be the same. Each time the image would ask for the soul of John Pawl, and each time the doctor would hide his face and shriek in utter agony: "No, no, no!"

And then the spirit would leave.

But one night, when the doctor woke from a doze into which he had fallen, he decided that the just thing to do would be to kill John Pawl and deliver his soul to the hunchback. He felt about this matter now much as he had felt about killing the lawyer. He accepted it with infinite calm, never thinking that for many days his conscience had been bothering him on the subject. With scarcely a thought as to what he was going to do when he got the editor there, he reached for the telephone and called him.

"I have a splendid story for you," he said. "Can you come up yourself?"

The editor would come, of course, as he had long been a friend of the doctor's, though he had seen little of him since the downfall. Within an hour he was seated with the surgeon in the library.

"What's your story, doctor?"

"You can't write it, John," said the surgeon. "We'll have a little drink and then I'll tell you about it."

He poured the drinks clumsily and pushed the tumbler over to the editor, who drained it at one draft.

"Now your story. Why can't I write it?"

"Because the story has to do with your death."

The editor by an effort maintained his calm. "Explain," he said with a slow smile.

"Do you remember Rolf Jaeke, the hunchback?"

"Of course. His case proved the big news sensation for a time—till Andrews went up for murder."

"It is because of Rolf Jaeke that you are here tonight." Some unknown power was forming the sentences he was repeating; some weird thing shot the words from his lips. He looked at the wall, half expecting to see the figure there—but the wall was blank.

"Yes," he said, "it is because of Jaeke that you are here tonight."

"Explain, please!" snapped the editor. The affair was getting on his already overwrought nerves.

"I will explain. Do you remember the curse with which the hunchback left the courtroom?"

"Surely. We played the thing up in the *Mail*."

"John Pawl, you were unjust to Jaeke."

"What? Why, man, *you* voted for the death penalty. What do you mean?"

"I mean that the curse of Rolf Jaeke is being carried out. Andrews was first; the district attorney was next; you are third."

"What?"

"Rolf Jaeke has sent me for your soul, John Pawl."

"Man, you're insane!" The editor stood up—passed his hand across his forehead as a strange wave of dizziness shot over him.

"Your soul, Pawl. Sit down!"

John Pawl sat down. He could not do otherwise with that fearful dizziness upon him. "What did you——"

"Just a little drug in your drink, Pawl!" But John Pawl did not hear. The drug had rendered him senseless already.

With a fierce strength the doctor carried the editor into an adjoining room where was a makeshift operating table ready for use. He laid the man on the table, strapped him down, and prepared for a weird operation.

It was perhaps three hours later that, urged on by an insistent devil in his brain, he called the police station and told them what he had done. He related every detail—even his conversation with John Pawl—omitting nothing. Perhaps they thought at the station that it was all a hoax, but it was the police sergeant's duty to investigate, and he did so immediately.

They rang the bell at the doctor's bachelor apartment, and when he did not answer the four policemen walked in, through the library and on into the laboratory. The sight of the man on the operating table caused them to grip their pistols more firmly; but apparently there was no cause for alarm. All else they could see of interest was the form of Dr. Linn huddled up in a big chair holding in his hands a large glass bottle.

"Good Lord," said the sergeant in charge, aghast at what he saw. "What's been going on here?"

"Ah," said the doctor in a low voice. "I am glad to see you, sir. I have been conducting a most interesting experiment in modern surgery."

His face was dead; his eyes were dead; his voice was dead. When he spoke it was mechanically, in a low, monotonous voice that grated on the ears. I shuddered as I looked at the doctor. I had come for a story. From all indications I was to get one.

"Yes, gentlemen, I have been extracting from a living man his soul. Here in this bottle I have the soul of John Pawl."

Stark madness showed in the man's eyes.

"By a delicate operation I have removed his soul in the interests of science and justice," he said.

The sergeant did not understand. But he knew his duty. "You are under arrest," he said, shortly.

The doctor stared at him in insane amazement. "What?" he thundered. "You would arrest me when I have done so much for science? Curse you! No you won't!"

His hand slipped into a chair-pocket and drew out a revolver. He raised it, but before he could fire, the bullets from the officers' pistols had ended a tragic career.

I slipped over and picked up the bottle, which was unbroken.

"So there's a soul in here?" I said.

"Bosh!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Open it."

"Not I," I answered.

The police officer took the glass bottle and with the butt of his gun knocked off the head. From the mouth there drifted up a tiny cloud of white vapor which shimmered queerly in the light of the room. From somewhere there seemed to come a dismal wailing—eery, heart-rending, terrible. Was it imagination? Maybe.

I gasped in horror. The policemen were strangely silent. They were aghast in the presence of the unknown. A soul in the bottle? I do not know. What is a human soul?

In the state's penitentiary twenty miles away Jason Andrews heard a guttural voice exulting:

"Fourteen men—and number four has paid! Fourteen men! One by one! One by one!"

The former mayor of Caledonia slipped to the door. He saw the guard looking in at the hunchback with a wondering, alarmed expression on his face. Despite the guard's presence the voice droned on:

"Fourteen men—and four have paid!"

Wide-eyed and sleepless, Jason Andrews passed another night of sheer horror.

4. *THREE MEN PAY THE DEBT*

The nine days of wonder following the strange case of Dr. Linn had scarce passed by when there occurred another amazing and terrible catastrophe. This was the affair of the bank cashier, Ralph Lettery. Naturally I did not see all the things of which I shall tell you, but I am putting the narrative together from the facts which came to me when I covered the whole series of tragedies.

On this particular afternoon Ralph Lettery walked into the bank which he ruled with an iron hand, drew two

revolvers from his coat pockets, shot down two tellers who were in his way, and proceeded to pack some twenty-five thousand dollars in an old valise he carried. Thereupon he walked casually from the building while the customers and clerks were lined up in dismay and horror against the wall.

The watchman tried to stop him as he went out but was mercilessly shot down. The absconding cashier had no chance whatever to escape, as already the burglar alarm was screaming its warning to high heaven after being released by one of the clerks who got into action the moment Lettery's back was turned.

The policemen came down upon him as he tried to get into his car—a revolver in one hand, the bag of money in the other. He tried to fight but they overpowered him and bore him away to the station.

Lettery was crazy; there was no doubt of that. His answers to the magistrate were wild and incoherent. I heard everything he said. I say he was crazy.

"Why did you do it?" asked the judge.

"He made me," said Lettery, pointing to the wall.

"Who?"

"Him—over there."

"There is no one there," said the judge.

The eyes of the cashier blazed with wrath.

"No one there? You fool, you fool! Can't you see him? He came for me, judge. He made me do it. And why? Why? Because I was on the jury that sentenced him. That's what I got for wanting to do my duty by the law. See, he's after me! Waiting there by the wall."

"Who is waiting?" asked the judge, more kindly.

"Rolf Jaeke!"

"But what has he to do with you?"

"Why, you fool, can't you see anything! I condemned him to prison. His curse is following me. His threat is riding me to the grave. He sent Andrews to prison. He caused the deaths of the district attorney and Dr. Linn and John Pawl. Four of the fourteen men he condemned have paid for what they did. And in the bitter night time he comes to me saying that I am number five."

The voice of the man rose almost to a screech. He ran his stubby fingers through his thin hair, gripping it till it came out in little tufts. He sank back exhausted in his chair.

What was wrong? I don't know. I maintained then that a sudden streak of insanity had struck Ralph Lettery and that he had run amuck. I don't doubt that he was crazy. He was a murderer, but I was very sorry for him later when I saw him taken to the train for the long journey to the asylum for the criminal insane.

As he looked back at us wildly when they put him on the train I knew I should never see him again.

AGAIN in his cell the hunchback was gloating through the somber night to Jason Andrews. All night the whispered taunts rang in his tortured ears. All night he rolled in an agony of torment and doubt; wondering, wondering, wondering. And the guard, reporting to the warden what he had heard, was plainly frightened,—a guard who had spent ten years in his position, handling violators of every law on the statutes without fear. The next morning the hunchback went before the warden for questioning.

THERE is the case of Damon and Pythias which must needs be given more than passing mention, since the crime connected with these two men relates closely to this narrative of the hunchback's curse, if the supposition of some men is true. I give it an unbiased way. I neither affirm nor deny. I am a police court re-

porter, so I believe only a little that I hear and half what I see.

The names of the men in question were Rufus Cline and George Raymond. To the city of Caledonia they were Damon and Pythias, named for the friendship that existed between them. In their case the rule of opposite attracting opposite held good. The man nicknamed Damon was tall and slim, well endowed with the goods of the world, silent, athletic, but apparently lacking pep and ginger off the athletic field. Pythias was small, very talkative and burning up with suppressed energy.

The two men were nearly always to be found together, the one doing most of the listening and spending, the other the talking. Each was perhaps in his late twenties. They had served on the jury; and the case of the cashier had given them both much food for thought.

In relating what happened I am piecing together the facts I learned later.

Cline and Raymond were sitting together one early evening discussing their situation.

Raymond, filled with energy, was naturally the more nervous of the two.

"Let's figure this thing out," he said. "Here we have the hunchback condemned to life imprisonment for a murder which he admitted. He curses the ones who sent him to the pen. By some strange coincidence five of the fourteen men he threatened have died—or worse than died. But is it coincidence?"

"Queer," said his friend shortly.

"What's worrying me is this: where do we get off?"

"Well, I don't——"

"Now if that damned curse is real——"

"Bosh!"

"Maybe so! But Andrews is in prison. Three men are dead. And Lettery is——" He shuddered in horror.

"Truth is strange," said Cline. "Coincidence."

"Well, I'm worried. I'm going down to the corner for a drink. Coming?"

"No, I think not. Come back after a while and we'll go to a show."

Raymond left the room.

Cline shivered slightly as he sat there in his chair. Beneath his calm, inscrutable mask a vivid imagination was beginning to work. Presently he dozed off to sleep.

Perhaps a half hour had passed when Raymond returned to the room. So far as outward appearances were concerned there was no change in the attitude of Cline. He lolled in the easy chair, fast asleep. Playfully his friend hurled a cushion at him, striking him full in the face. He leaped to his feet, his face working violently.

"Why did you do that?" he snarled, with an oath.

Raymond was taken aback. Never before had his pal spoken to him in such a tone as that.

"Let's go to the show," he said. "Get your hat, old grouch. You should have come along after the shot of poison."

"We won't go to the show," said Cline. "Get out."

Raymond looked at him in growing amazement, standing his ground.

"Get out or I'll kill you!"

"Hop ahead," said Raymond, and sat down.

Cline walked to the desk and got a long paper-knife.

"If you aren't out of here in one minute I'll let you have this."

"Shoot," said Pythias.

Cline leaned forward. In that fraction of a second before Cline acted, Raymond *knew*. He saw the demoniac face of the hunchback leering at him; saw the cruel eyes pierce him through; heard the tiger snarl with which the man had left the courtroom

on his way to doom. Horror shot through him. He thought he heard a voice—a cruel, hideous voice, blood-curdling, yet soft and velvety—like a tiger's paw. There were claws in the velvet. "Number six," said the voice of horror.

Cline buried the knife to its hilt in the throat of his friend. For a moment he stood there in a trance. Then, as if he realized what he had done, an expression of unutterable horror crossed his face. With a little moan of agony he dropped to his knees.

In a prison cell twenty miles away Jason Andrews heard the hunchback gloating. He knew that he could stand little more. Reason was tottering. But little stress would now be required to break the last slender cord of sanity.

5. SIX MEN IN A BOAT

For several weeks following the events of the last chapter little of note happened in Caledonia. The front pages of the newspapers had ceased to give space to the hunchback and the unhappy trend of circumstances that led many to believe that all things were not as they should be. The fact that the hunchback had been found unconscious on the floor of his cell the night of Raymond's death had caused a good deal of idle chatter. But I for one was still willing to believe that it was all a matter of unfortunate coincidence, despite the tale which was told to me and set forth in the last chapter.

The beginning of the fifth week after the death of Raymond marked the occasion of the greatest and most terrible catastrophe which has ever occurred in the history of Caledonia.

It was Monday night; and the day was to prove one not easily forgotten. Past Caledonia to the east there runs a turbulent stream, noisy and dangerous, though easily navigable by one who knows his business. But three miles below the home of Judge Fowler, whose estate borders the river, there is a series of rapids which can be passed in safety only by the most skilful boatmen. The river gains speed as it approaches these rapids, the water rushing in among the rocks screaming like a wild thing in agony. Near the home of the judge the water is relatively peaceful; at the falls it is dark and treacherous and terrible in its every aspect.

On this particular Monday night the judge was entertaining a number of men in his home. There were there that evening perhaps forty of these business and professional men of Caledonia. They enjoyed a gay dinner, then discussed various things till perhaps 10 o'clock. Now the judge was a stickler for prohibition, but among these men were a dozen or so who enjoyed their drink when they could get it. During the course of the evening the word was passed about that there was something to drink across the river, and that a couple of boats were at the bank for their convenience. Unobtrusively these men slipped out after bidding the judge good night. They gathered under the trees near the water where were the boats.

"Pile in, boys, and we'll go across."

One of the men present had already found a source of supply, and was a little the worse for wear—this despite the fact that only a few minutes before he had come from the house of a judge who hated liquor. He brought the attention of the others to a strange fact as he started to step into a boat and then backed away.

"No shir! Theresh a man in there wish a cursh on him. Boat'll shink, shure's blashes. No shir!"

There was a little uneasiness at the statement. Among the assembled dozen there were six men who had

served on the jury which had convicted the hunchback. The fact that they were here together was not in itself particularly striking. Each was a businessman of the city, each was distinctly nervous over the outcome of the hunchback's curse thus far, and each apparently wanted to kill his nervousness with a few drinks of bootleg liquor.

"Put 'em in shame boat," said the tipsy one. "No ushe all gettin' curshed."

"All right, we six will go to hell together," said one of the six with a sorry attempt at bravado.

There was no opposition. The condemned six climbed into one boat, and the men started across the river.

They drank deeply, particularly the ones who had fallen under the curse. The one boatload returned shortly, but the six stayed on. Presently they were alone—even the bootlegger and his aide were gone. After a while, completely drunk, they decided to return to the city.

The boat was in its place and they clambered awkwardly in, nearly upsetting it as they did so. Then they were adrift, without oars, without means of guiding their craft. One of them started a drunken song and the rest joined in, oblivious of the fact that their boat was drifting down the river.

Happy in their condition they floated on and on along the current which seems to gather speed as it approaches the rapids. The boat was beginning to whirl, and this fact registered itself on the attention of one not so far gone as his comrades. He screamed in terror, but it helped naught.

Down to the rapids came the craft with the six men and by sheer chance leaped the first falls. The boat swung dizzily about, careened dangerously, leaped madly toward the series of rocks below. Gathering speed with every moment she hurtled to disaster, touched a sharp rock, plunged to destruction over the second falls. Sane at the last moment, the six jurors uttered a terrible cry in unison as they looked through the gates of death. The boat was sundered and broken. The madly swirling water hurled the dead bodies hither and yon as lightly as straws.

In the penitentiary Jason Andrews heard the hunchback snarling over a new disaster. His tortured mind urged him to the door of his cell. He stood there with his fingers wound about the bars, his mad eyes staring across the corridor to the cell in which lay the satanic hunchback. If before now the latter had shown nerve by his actions in prison, now he showed the bravado of a gladiator. He stood at the door of his cell raving, apparently stark mad. But this time there seemed to be something wrong.

"Dead!" he screamed. "Dead, six of them—and I had nothing to do with it! Dead—six at once! Oh, God! is there no justice? Six at a time and I wanted them to go one by one!"

Two guards came hurriedly down the corridor. The cell door was opened and Rolf Jaeke taken away.

Jason Andrews never saw him again, but whether he did or not would have made little difference. Thereafter until his dying day the former mayor of Caledonia recognized no man. The events which led up to the final tragedy had so completely warped his mind that this last catastrophe snapped the slender thread which yet bound his reason. And it was a stark mad, raving, fighting, biting, cursing maniac who was later carried from the cell in a straitjacket.

They took Rolf Jaeke from his cell to the warden's office, questioned him there as to his conduct, and sent him to the "hole."

Next day when the tragedy of the night was discovered by the townspeople they brought the man again before the warden and he was subjected to a severe grueling.

"So you say," asked the warden, "that you are responsible for the deaths of several men and the imprisonment of Jason Andrews but that you had nothing to do with these six men?"

"Yah!" snarled the hunchback. "I brought your worthy mayor here. I caused the death of the district attorney; I caused Linn to kill the editor; I made the cashier steal and kill: I made Cline kill Raymond in a fit of rage. But the six men—damn them! — they got drunk and killed themselves. I had it all planned out how I'd do it. One man would hang himself, one would——"

The warden, hardened as he was, recoiled as from the shadow of great evil.

"That's enough! You say you committed these crimes. You were never away from prison. How did you do it?"

"There is one more to pay. When the judge is dead I will tell you."

"Good God, man, have you no fear of divine wrath?"

The hunchback laughed, a slow, cruel, taunting laugh.

"Were it not for your alleged curse I should say that you were striving for some pretty rotten publicity."

"I don't care about publicity. What I want, dear warden, more than anything else is *revenge!*"

"How did you do it?" snapped the warden.

Again the slow, cruel smile.

"Was it hypnotism?"

"When the judge is dead I will tell you."

The warden snarled: "Take him to the hole. Feed him bread and water, and damned little of that!"

They led the hunchback out. His parting shot was:

"Next Sunday night the judge shall die. Remember what I'm telling you. Sunday night the judge shall die!"

Roughly he was hurled into the corridor, led down it. Back to them in the warden's office came his taunting laughter—hideous, snarling, *bestial!*

6. *THE JUDGE PAYS THE PENALTY*

JUDGE FOWLER was a calm, matter of fact, slow-moving man of perhaps fifty years. What torments of doubt he must have gone through during the three days before Sunday on which the hunchback had said that his death must come none will ever know, for the judge was a close-mouthed man and even in death he could say nothing—though he saw the shadow in the offing several minutes before he was struck down.

On Saturday afternoon the judge's son arrived from the university, where he was the youthful head of the department of psychology. He went over the whole case thoroughly, leaving out no possible clue to the mystery. From every angle he looked into the case: cold and practical, though it concerned his own father.

As Sunday approached, the judge grew a little more nervous. His usually quiet nature became in a measure irascible, but except for one or two slight bursts of temper he was unusually calm for such a situation.

Sunday came. The day, contrary to the spirits of the town, was very sunny and lovely. All over the city men were gathered in little groups discussing the expected tragedy. For after the preceding events there were few who did not believe that the judge would die as predicted. The

(Continued on page 135)

ON THE DEAD MAN'S CHEST

BY ELI COLTER

"When I'm dead and laid out in my coffin, I want you to pin this flower squarely in the center of my chest. And when I come back I'll show it to you."

IT WAS a gorgeous day in early spring. The world was fresh and new, clothed in a dozen shades of green still wet with morning rain. The still, clear air was vibrant with life, smelling to high heaven with the balsam glory of the pines. A low-slung blue car sped along the cement highway, and two men seated on the roadster's deep leather cushions watched in contented silence as the landscape flashed by. The road emerged suddenly from the forest, described a curve and ascended a long hill. At the top of the hill the driver brought his car to an abrupt, sliding stop and sat gazing ahead, saying nothing. After waiting in surprized silence for a moment, his companion asked, with amused curiosity, "Do we stop for water, jehu?"

The driver did not answer immediately. His eyes roved, lingering, over the entire landscape, and he settled in his seat, keeping his eyes straight ahead. Then, pointing down the slope, he replied, "I ask you to look, Peter. I ask you to look."

Peter Garvin looked. (Pete Garvin, rather; no one else ever called him Peter.) The road dipped swiftly down the hill in front of them and ran itself into the horizon across a low, flat valley. For miles the highway lay straight as a plumbline. The valley itself presented the appearance of an immense checker-board, laid off in precisely squared fields. Some of the squares were black, the rich black of lately plowed loam. Some were tinged with inch-high oats, so that they gleamed with the shimmer of two-faced silk, loam-black or gray-green as the sun's light struck the surface. One was a dull cream color, where a veil of white lime had been spread on the steaming earth. Three of the squares were green as nothing

else is green; young fields of wheat, in spring.

The valley ended abruptly about two miles beyond, where it was fenced in by a dark, heavy forest. Beyond the forest a line of foothills rose blue as indigo; and beyond the foothills one white-capped peak reared straight upward against a cloudless cobalt sky. In the valley, just below the hill, a man was spraying his fruit trees with some mixture that emitted a pale yellow cloud. Orchardist and spraying apparatus were invisible, but the cloud of spray lifted in the air like a canary-colored plume. An old, tumble-down rail fence ran along the highway at the left, and four swallows with glinting purple-blue backs were flitting back and forth across the moss-moldered rails.

"Well, I've looked," Garvin said, with a humorous smile. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"*Pretty!* Lord!" The driver twisted under the wheel and turned his head to stare at his companion. The twisting was not easily accomplished, for he had little space in which to move, even though the seat and steering gear had been especially constructed to accommodate his huge bulk. Felix Underwood was a mountain of a man; an unlovely, contorted mountain of bulging flesh. He repeated again the word that had offended his appreciative sense of the majestic scene stretched before them. "Pretty!—Peter! Haven't you any eyes? That's *beauty!* The beauty that never dies. Here every spring in the same old place. All we have to do is come and look——" He paused, then added softly, "If we have eyes with which to see."

Pete Garvin gaped at him like an astonished owl. Was this Felix Underwood? Felix, whose booming voice was mostly geared to conversation concerning crankshafts and carburetors; Felix, whose raucous basso eternally held forth anent V engines pro and con, or the merits of various spark plugs; Felix, gently singing praises of the beauty of nature!

"And to think," Underwood went on, more softly still, "men can look at a world like that and say there is no God!"

Garvin's astonishment increased. This was rank heresy! The two were members of a curious club in Bass City; a club rather widely known, since it flaunted itself not at all, pandered to because it was composed of wealthy bachelors most of whom lived in the palatial club building, but viewed somewhat uneasily by society at large because of its avowed faith—or, rather, unfaith. For though the members of the *Squared Circle* did not exactly shout its tenets from the housetops, it was an open secret that no man could gain admittance to its luring doors unless he was a sincere, staunch atheist. The club numbered on its roster an exact fifty members, never more, never less. When a member died or moved away a new man was taken in from the always handy waiting list, but the aspirant for fellowship must be suggested, approved and vouched for by a member in good standing.

Pete Garvin and Felix Underwood, striking opposites in external appearance though strangely alike as to the inner man, had been fast friends and almost constant companions for five years; ever since Garvin had joined the *Squared Circle*. Both of them were greatly loved by the clique of twenty known as the *Inner Circle*: which clique embraced the most violent, picked unbelievers of the whole club. In all the five years of comradeship with Underwood, Garvin had never before heard him refer to God as even a remote possibility; and this remark, verging on unqualified assertion that there must be a God, coming out of a clear sky, shocked Garvin into momentary speechless-

ness. Underwood glanced at him sharply, misreading his expression.

"Good Lord, Peter, what's the matter with you?" The big man's impatience was mitigated by an odd tone of appeal, an appeal for the other's understanding. "Do you suppose a fellow has to be born a skinny poet with long hair and a vapid face in order to appreciate the beauties of nature? . . . Ever attend the circus, Peter?"

"When I was a kid," Garvin nodded, startled by the irrelevance of the question. He did not see fit to enlighten Underwood as to just what had caused his astonishment. No doubt he was well aware, anyhow, and preferred avoiding the issue. Personally, Garvin could see no reason for believing in a God, but he had no relish for, at this late day, raking up an argument with his chum concerning the intricacies of religion. Underwood resumed a rapid earnest speech, as though in the grip of some great urge to make himself intelligible.

"And I suppose you thought that the circus elephant, going through his rigmarole of clumsy tricks, was perfectly satisfied with his atrocious skin and lumbering frame, just because he was born an elephant? And how, by any manner of means, could you know that? How do you know he wasn't possessed of a rebellent longing to blossom into a white stallion, resplendent in gilt trappings, galloping around the sawdust ring with a pink-gauzed lady on his back? And I suppose you think I am content to remain the ugliest accident that ever happened just because I was born that way! Look at me, Peter."

Pete Garvin glanced sharply into Underwood's face. It was a terrible countenance. One whole side of it was covered with a glaring purple birthmark, blotchy and repulsive, ridged and horrible. Eye, cheek and forehead were twisted, warped and skewed by the purple splotch till it was little more than a caricature of a face that Felix Underwood wore. The fat, bulbous nose, the sharp squirrel teeth, the thick pendulous mouth and little watery-blue eyes added so much of repellent facial contour that the massive head with its flaring, pointed ears bore likeness to nothing so much as a gargoyle. But Garvin's clear vision, unflinching, looked beyond the preposterous face to the keen brain and noble spirit behind.

"Yes?" he said, with a kind of gentleness, not knowing why.

"You couldn't imagine any woman falling in love with me, could you, Peter?" Underwood inquired, and there was no bitterness in the words.

Garvin shook his head helplessly. Of course, he couldn't. This unexpected, unprecedented mood of Felix's hurt him intensely. The man was so obviously in earnest; or, was he? Perhaps he was ill, or merely trying to kid somebody. No, Felix wasn't a kidder. He was serious. Seeing that Garvin was momentarily incapable of answering, Felix Underwood smiled. It was not a pleasant smile. It was more like a grimace, twisting one light blue eye grotesquely in the surrounding purple blot.

The heavy, booming voice hardened as it went on, "Well, I'm forty-eight years old and no woman ever has. But I've loved a hundred. You dance, don't you, Peter? A dance floor can be an enticing place, with the beat of the orchestra, the slip-slip of soles on the waxed boards, the perfume and color of the women's gowns. But—could you imagine *me* on a dance floor, Peter?"

Garvin, his astonishment growing with his chum's every word, was tongue-tied. Imagine the enormous

man on a *dance floor?* Of course he couldn't! Underwood's intensifying mood bewildered and oppressed him. He wanted to say something, but he had no idea what the right phrase might be. Better keep his mouth shut. And, too, he was ashamed of himself. Involuntarily he had glanced at the twisted club-foot resting on the gas pedal, and he knew that Underwood had seen that glance. Yet, seeing, Underwood made no sign. He continued talking, but his voice rasped like a file on saw-teeth.

"It isn't necessary for you to speak, Peter. I understand. I love beauty, and above all other the beauty of the woods. That is why I always frequent the woods in spring, in my car. But I've never held a gun in my hand, never seen an animal wild, never battled a wary fish in a mountain stream. I have dreamed of hip-boots and singing reels, of bacon sizzling in a pan and a big buck hanging in a tree, of a mist-covered lake at dawn and wild duck lifting cover. But you couldn't imagine me dragging my three hundred and seventy pounds through the brush, could you, Peter?"

Garvin set his jaw. Of course he couldn't! He saw without looking the specially constructed gear, seat and pedals of the car; the unwieldy, waddling gait of the man as he walked. But words were still beyond him; largely because he loved the man; had himself been hurt a hundred times for Felix in the astounded, repugnant glances of casual passers-by.

There is a love that exists between men too deep for common speech, too powerful for expression; often hidden under the lightest raillery, sometimes barely brushed at the surface in a chance comradely touch or word. It is a love some hold even beyond the love of woman, certainly a love few women can understand. The thing Damon and Pythias, and David and Jonathan knew. Such love, despite the huge Underwood's repulsive exterior, existed between these two, and Garvin, in the grip of that love, remained speechless.

"Look there."

The big man pointed with a pudgy forefinger, and Garvin shifted his gaze to locate the thing indicated by the pointing digit. It was a low hill well down the valley to the right, perhaps a mile or two distant. On the very crest of the hill a small white patch showed with marked distinctness against the surrounding deep green of the trees.

"I'd like to climb that hill, Peter, and see what makes that patch so white. It can't be snow. But can you imagine me—oh, hell! What's the use!"

The club-foot jammed the starter, its mate threw in the clutch, and the twisted foot slipped to the gas pedal. The car leaped ahead with a violent jerk, the gear slammed into high, and the powerful motor roared through the valley at a forty mile pace. Just beyond a graveled crossroad the driver roughly slowed down his car and brought it to a halt, looking at Pete Garvin with a slightly sheepish grin.

"By cats, Peter, the road we just passed runs up that hill with the white patch on its crest! I'm going back."

Garvin nodded, signifying his acquiescence in anything the other might choose to do. The big man backed and whirled the car, retraced the few hundred feet between and swung up the crossroad. At the foot of the hill the road became almost impassable, overgrown with small underbrush and tall fern, still wet enough from the recent rain to be tricky traction for even full balloon tires. Underwood threw the gear into low and plowed doggedly up the slope. Garvin still said nothing, secretly becoming increasingly amazed and upset by his chum's unheard-of mood; but as the car halted at the

edge of the sought patch he emitted a low whistle of surprize.

At one time a homestead had graced the hilltop. The shell of it remained, long since deserted; the log cabin pitching erazily to one side, sag-beamed, with its roof half fallen in. The cleared space in front of the old cabin, perhaps an acre forming an irregular square, was thickly overgrown with a type of bloom Garvin had never seen before. The whole space was one mass of tiny, snowy flowers standing knee-high, like a spotless blanket laid upon the ground.

Underwood, staring at them, said under his breath, "Well, I'll be damned! Immortelles!" He turned his face toward Garvin, explaining aloud, "They're my favorite flower, Peter. Never told you that, did I? Know why I like 'em? They never die. I wonder if anything does? I wonder if *we* do! Do you really believe we're finished when they stick us under the ground? Of course the body is: I mean the entity, the spark of intelligence that talks, and loves, and hates, and remembers."

"For the love of Moses, Felix—what's the matter with *you?*"

Pete Garvin frowned, uneasy and nonplussed. Heresy was right! Felix Underwood, perhaps the best-loved member of the *Inner Circle*, after nine years' consistent refutation of God and souls and such pish-tush as the hereafter, abruptly falling from grace and deliberately expressing countenance of such beliefs! Certainly, after five years of constant companionship with him, this was a Felix he had never seen before. It did not occur to him that it was the *real* Felix inside the gross tonnage of flesh, the Felix none of them had ever sensed.

Underwood's mouth twisted in a wry smile. "Nothing is the matter, Peter," he answered quietly. "Only I'm speaking my thoughts to a friend for the first time in my life—and perhaps for the last. I should really like to know what you think about all the things we pretend to refute; God, and the soul, and the afterwards—that most specifically. Do the dead live on? Can they come back, if it so happens they desire to do so?"

"Good Lord, Felix! You know what I believe! And it isn't pretense, either. There can't be any God. Nonsense! An old white-haired patriarch sitting upon the clouds ruling the world with a star-bejeweled scepter? Fairy tales for two-year-olds! As for the entity, as you call it; evolution answers the whole question. Dogs and elephants think, don't they? And nobody worries whether or not they 'go on.' We humans are cursed with a little higher rate of intelligence and we rake up all manner of idiotic hypotheses with which to run our brains ragged. That is, some humans follow that policy. Not I! See here, Felix—you don't mean to tell me you believe the preposterous claim that people have souls? Some kind of invisible, etherous counterpart that lives after death, and can come back any time it chooses? You *can't* think that!" Having found his tongue at last, Garvin was putting it to work.

"No, I don't think that," Underwood answered, and a strange, profound sadness settled over the blotched distorted face. *"I know it!"* An electric silence followed the big man's vehement assertion, and the look of sadness deepened at Garvin's instant expression of dismay. "And I'm going to prove it. Peter. Look."

Laboriously, he leaned from the car to pick a sprig of the immortelle brushing against the foredoor, and settled back in his seat, extending the sprig toward Garvin, drawing it back as Pete made a motion to take the flower.

"No, just look at it. I'm going to put it away where it will be safe from the weather and accident. Time won't affect it. See—touch it. Just like waxed tissue-paper. In ten years it

will be as white and fresh as now if it is protected from dust and destruction. And when I die, Peter——" He hesitated, and the look of sadness for the first time caught Garvin's eye. Garvin hastily averted his face. "When I die, I'm coming back and show it to you. What I'm wondering is, if afterward the elephant remains an elephant, as it were. I wonder if I can shed—this?" With a quick, comprehensive gesture he indicated his misshapen, bulky body and hideous, warped, discolored face.

"Felix, I don't know what to say. I——" Garvin made an effort at speech, but Underwood cut him short, laying a hand on his arm.

"Don't say anything, Peter. But I want to tell you now that I've always liked you better than anyone I ever knew. Because you never seemed to see—this."

"I didn't see it," Garvin said bruskly.

"I know that." The booming voice warmed with a kind of gratitude. "*I've* never been able to see anything else. I'd like to come back to you straight and slim, as well muscled and proportioned as you yourself. And—damn it"—Underwood's voice sank to a tense whisper—"I will! And you'll know me—by this!"

He held up to view the sprig of immortelle, then with infinite care slipped it into a wallet and returned the wallet to the pocket from which he had taken it. Then he stepped on the starter, turned the car and headed it down the hill.

Pete Garvin spent several unpleasant hours with himself before he decided what he should do. The man he wanted to see was Lafe Daniels, president of the *Inner Circle*, the most cool, matter-of-fact and hard-headed man he knew; the most violent skeptic, sincere atheist and all-around unbeliever of the whole *Squared Circle*. Lafe Daniels, banker and controller of Nebraska Consolidated; Lafe Daniels was the man!

Over the telephone Garvin located the banker at the home of a friend, and the banker, who was just on the point of leaving, agreed amiably to a serious conclave, and invited Garvin to meet him at his bachelor quarters at the club. Most of the fifty members of the *Squared Circle* stood a little in awe of the banker, but not Pete. He had, in the vernacular, "got under Daniels' hide" enough to know him, like him and respect him, and had a wholesome regard for the elder man's judgment. Garvin, first to arrive at the club, was waiting restlessly at the banker's door when that man arrived, and he heaved a sigh of relief as the slim, alert elder man emerged from the elevator and came down the hall toward him, swinging his latch-key between his fingers.

"Evening, Pete," Daniels greeted sociably, inserting the key in his door, unlocking it and switching on the lights. "Come in and have a drink. What's the rumpus?"

"Rumpus?" Garvin preceded his host, and stood restlessly waiting as the banker hung up their hats. "No rumpus. I just wanted to talk seriously to someone with a sound set of brains and the ability to use them."

"Thanks," Daniels responded dryly, turning with his customary briskness to the sideboard, lifting a decanter standing there and pouring two stiff drinks. "Soda? No? Raw, eh? Only way. Well, throw that under your belt. It'll set you up a bit."

Garvin accepted the glass extended toward him, raising it absently.

"Here's how!"

The two men gulped down the stinging amber liquid. Daniels set his glass on a small table, motioned Garvin to a chair, threw himself into a heavy Roman seat by the small stand upon which he had placed decanter and glasses, and smiled at his unexpected caller. "Ah, that's

better! Now, Pete—what's on your mind?"

"Felix Underwood," Garvin answered succinctly, setting down his own emptied glass and taking a chair facing his host.

"Whew! Quite a load!"

Daniels' facetious answer rubbed Garvin unpleasantly the wrong way. He still saw altogether too clearly in his mind's eye the strange look of sadness that had settled over the grotesque features that afternoon on the hill-top.

He frowned, and answered slowly, choosing his words, "We all think we know Felix pretty well, don't we, Lafe? You know him rather intimately, don't you?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say intimately, Pete. No one knows him so well as you do. But what's up, anyway? Felix is a pretty tough-looking specimen, but he's all right inside."

"You know it!" Garvin hesitated again. It wasn't easy to get out what he wanted to say. Men had been expelled from the *Squared Circle* for less than Felix had said there on the hill. No one had ever found Pete Garvin guilty of betraying a friend. He dared not risk getting Felix in wrong with the president of the *Inner Circle*, so he compromised, skirting the real issue. "I was driving with him this afternoon, Lafe. I discovered something. I discovered that Felix has a side—a hidden, inner side—that none of us ever suspected."

"Everybody has," Daniels replied easily. "What's in that to upset you?"

"He's worried about something. I don't know how to express it without sounding—oh, damn it!—the poor old scout's been secretly depressed by his looks, all his life. I never suspected it before. He blurted it all out this afternoon. I was so stunned I couldn't say a word. What do you think, Lafe? He's wondering if we live after death, and if so, it might be possible for him to shed his unsightly bulk and acquire a normal body afterward."

"He—*what?*" Daniels sat up in astonishment. "I say, Pete, that's rather unhealthy talk!"

"I know it." Garvin's face was somber. "I've always thought the world of Felix, but I never tried to probe him, or analyze him. I was knocked for a goal when he sprang that on me today. He seems to be set on getting rid of his Caliban exterior and blossoming into a regular Adonis when he kicks off. See here, Lafe. You don't reckon there's a screw loose in old Felix's brain, do you?"

"That's the only explanation." Daniels' response was tinged with asperity. "Of all the asinine, goofy rubbish to come from a member of the *Inner Circle!* Felix is on dangerous ground. Next thing he'll be telling us he's found himself a God."

Garvin caught his breath as Daniels paused to light a cigar. The banker extended the case. "Smoke, Pete? No? Well, I'll tell you. I shouldn't let it bother me. Felix is the victim of an inferiority complex, maybe. No doubt if we looked like him, we'd kick about it, secretly, at least. Don't you think?"

"Perhaps. I've never given it any thought," Garvin answered morosely.

"Most people have some hallucination or other," the banker went on, his impatience passing. "With a lot of them it's this business of what comes after death. That's idiotic. And it's worse than idiotic in a man who has belonged to the *Inner Circle* for nine years. It's plain as a pikestaff what comes after. You die, and you're dead, and that's all there is to it. They plant you in the terra firma and the worms make merry with what's left. This business of believing there is anything more of us to 'go on somewhere' to some mythical,

imaginary plane, is the puerile pap they feed weaklings who are afraid to face oblivion. We face it every night for seven or eight hours. Why is it any worse to go to sleep and never wake up? Rot!"

"Of course. But it bothers me to see old Felix getting any such ideas."

"Don't let it!" Daniels laughed and blew a smoke ring at the decanter. "Have a drink. That's what you need. I know I don't give a continental about ending it myself. I don't lie, and I don't cheat, and I don't steal. I treat the other fellow as I'd like to be treated, and I've nothing to fear. Here—I'll give you my creed in a toast."

The banker poured the glasses full of the smooth liquor, motioned Garvin to take one, lifted his own to the light and studied the clear amber liquid as he chanted:

"We come into this world all naked and bare,
We go through this world full of sorrow and care,
We pass out of this world God only knows where,
But if we're thoroughbreds here we'll be thoroughbreds there."

He drained the glass, set it down upon the table and grinned.

"Well, if that's your creed," Garvin came back quickly, "it distinctly admits the possibility of a God and a probable hereafter."

"Decidedly not!" Daniels denied indignantly. "It is merely the expression of the idea that if we do our best here it's all any man can do."

"Perhaps." Garvin smiled. "But you mark my word, Lafe, somebody ought to check up on Felix. . . . What's that?"

"Only the telephone, Pete. I'd say your nerves are on edge. Excuse me while I answer it. What'd you think it was? Crack of doom?"

The banker rose and went into the adjoining room where the telephone was installed. Garvin heard the murmur of his voice, the click of the receiver being returned to its hook, and looked up to see the banker re-entering the room with a broad grin on his face.

"What's so funny? Who was it?" Garvin asked.

"Felix!" The banker's broad grin widened. "He wants to talk to me. Gosh, I'm popular tonight, eh? I told him you were here and he said that was a piece of sheer good luck. He'll be right over—he's just across the street."

"I told you he was all het up." Garvin turned in his chair, and he wore so deep an expression of concern that it sobered the facetious banker.

"Oh, hold on a minute, Pete. You're altogether too serious about some fool mood of Felix's. Wait till I talk a little sense into him. There's the bell—must be he now."

DANIELS rose, stepped to the door and opened it, to disclose the huge bulk of Felix Underwood waiting beyond.

"Come in, Felix. You're welcome as only you could be. What have you been doing to Pete? He's as het up as he accuses you of being."

"H'lo, Lafe. 'Lo, Peter." Underwood squeezed his gross body through the doorway, eased himself into a reclining position on the divan beyond the chair where Garvin was seated, and shoved his hat back on his head. The somber melancholy that had so unsettled Garvin earlier that day was still evident on the disfigured, purple-blotched face. He shook his head at the banker. "I haven't been doing anything to Peter. And I'm not het up, even if he is. Lafe—we're a hard-boiled bunch in the *Inner Circle*, aren't we? We claim not to believe in God, Christ, the soul, heaven or hell or hereafter, don't we?"

(Continued on page 128)

The DEAD SOUL

by Raoul Lenoir

"She was following him stiffly, mechanically, with the dull lethargy of a sleep-walker."

SEATED in a steamer chair beneath the gloom of an awning which blotted its sharp shadow across a section of the deck of the river steamer *Amenothes II*, Sternberg, the Austrian, lit a fresh cigarette and repeated his question to the man who sat beside him: "What do you know of Von Schrimm?"

Overhead the chill disk of the full moon rode high in the void of an unclouded sky, flooding the Egyptian landscape in the weird soft glow of its radiance, so that from the deck the eye roved restfully across a scene of milky whiteness and sharp shadows, the gleaming waters of the Nile, the dark loom of the shore, the delicate tracery of the palm tops and the deep blotches of darkness where their massed shadows fell heavily across the thirsty earth. Even the mud walls and miserable hovels of the fellaheen stood transformed in the enchantment of the white light, freed for a space from the squalor and heat-blistered desolation which the blaze of day so pitilessly revealed

George Lawson turned toward his questioner. The first interrogation, coming sudden and unexpected upon the heels of a long period of silence, had but served to shatter his moonlight revery; its insistent repetition demanded an answer.

"Not much," he admitted. "We met him first on the excursion to the pyramids. We were staying at the Continental and so was he. Chance threw us together a good deal in the various jaunts around Cairo, and our acquaintance developed as a matter of course. He is a lonely man, I fancy. His mind seems so deeply saturated with archeology that he has missed everything else in life. I believe he found our society a pleasant relaxation. He was always a capital companion, even though his conversation is apt to run forever on his favorite subject."

"Did you arrange to take this river trip together?"

"No, that was quite a coincidence. He left the Continental several days before we did. It was a mutual surprize when we met on board. For

the rest, you know as much about him as I do. You have met him and talked to him frequently on this trip. You must admit at the least that he is a gentleman and remarkably well versed in the lore of ancient Egypt. But why this questioning?"

Sternberg flicked the stub of his cigarette across the rail into the Nile.

"Mr. Lawson," he said, speaking slowly, as one who measures his words, "you are an American and I presume you are quite capable of managing your own business without outside interference. At the same time I am old enough in body to be your father and old enough in knowledge to be your long-forgotten ancestor, and I am thick-skinned enough to risk insulting you if thereby I may do you a service. There are several reasons for my curiosity, but one is sufficient for the moment. Frankly it seems to me that this Von Schrimm is far more interested in your wife's society than should be good for your peace of mind."

Lawson flushed angrily.

"Indeed?" he said with frigid politeness.

"Oh, you are insulted, of course," continued Sternberg, calmly lighting a fresh cigarette, "yet, if you will be fair, you will see that there is no cause for offense. What I say, I say in the greatest friendship. Were I less of a friend I should keep silent. I do not suggest that your wife is in the slightest degree a party to this situation. I do not believe she suspects it. I will say, however, that Von Schrimm does not beget my confidence. He is a man of powerful personality—of evil personality. If I were you I should view him with suspicion and distrust."

"Mrs. Lawson is quite capable of looking after herself," remarked Lawson, still with some annoyance.

"No woman is capable of looking after herself when dealing with a man of Von Schrimm's type," returned the Austrian calmly. "Have you ever looked into his eyes?"

"Well, his eyes, at least, don't fascinate Hetty. She has even said unkind things about them."

"What did she say?"

"She said that they looked like the eyes of a 'dead soul' and she hated them."

Sternberg sat up in his chair so suddenly that his glowing cigarette fell from his lips and rolled across the deck.

"Did she say *that?*" he demanded.

"Those were the very words she used. Rather original, don't you think—the eyes of a 'dead soul'?"

"Very," answered the Austrian with an emphasis that was lost upon Lawson.

He extracted and lit another cigarette. There was a silence.

"Did you ever meet a 'dead soul'?"

There was an intenseness in the question which caused Lawson to stare at his companion in surprize.

"Good, God, no! Did *you?*"

"Once," said the Austrian, quietly. "It was a ghastly business."

"What on earth are you talking about?" cried Lawson in horrified amazement.

"Life is an awful mystery, whichever way you look at it," continued Sternberg imperturbably, speaking in a low voice, almost as though to himself. "We moderns are apt to forget that the ancients came closer to solving some of its mysteries than we with our boasted science have ever done. Even the ancients did not solve the mystery of the soul, but they did discover that man has still several bodily vehicles remaining to him after he has discarded his earth body in the change which we call death. Each of these finer bodies he discards in turn but they, being possessed of a certain inherent life of their own, do not immediately disintegrate when the 'soul' abandons them. Instead,

they drift around more or less aimlessly for indefinite periods. They form the foundation of most of the ghost stories. Sometimes through some tragic disaster a 'soul' is arrested in its evolution and is doomed to wander for vast spaces of time imprisoned in one of these discarded vehicles. You might call it a 'dead soul'."

"What an awful idea!" said Lawson with a shiver. "Wherever did you unearth that ghastly belief? What conceivable thing could cause the death of a soul?"

Sternberg coolly hunted for another cigarette.

"Did you ever have a nightmare?" he asked grimly.

"Why, yes." Lawson's tone was puzzled.

"Then," pursued the Austrian deliberately, "you will remember that on occasions it has seemed to you that you were hunted through dark corridors and fathomless spaces by nameless horrors from which you strove frantically to escape. On these occasions you have been paralyzed with terror, but always you have awaked in time to save your soul from the clutch of the demons which were upon it, and you have never realized when you awoke how real had been your peril. Now, do you understand how a soul dies?"

"You mean——?"

"Yes, I mean just that. Some people never awaken from their nightmares. They are found dead in their beds. Their 'souls' while absent from their bodies in sleep have been overpowered by some malevolent power and their progress in the scheme of existence indefinitely arrested. These mysterious deaths are popularly ascribed to 'heart failure'. Oh well——"

He rose abruptly, and, crumpling his cigarette into a shapeless mass with nervous fingers, pitched it over the rail. "Let us go around to the other side and join the rest," he said.

They passed round the corner of the deck house and crossed over to the starboard side of the deck, where the majority of the passengers of the *Amenothes II* were clustered in little groups along the rail, chatting and gazing idly into the swirls and sparkles of the silver-splashed water overside.

A little apart from the rest Von Schrimm and Mrs. Lawson were engaged in an animated conversation. He was pointing out across the desert and describing something, evidently humorous, with his characteristic intensity, and as Lawson came into earshot the sound of his wife's laugh floated toward him through the stillness of the moonlight.

2

"OH THE devil!"

Lawson leaned across the rail and gazed disgustedly at the low march of sun-smitten thirsty earth that marked the confines of the shallow, turgid river.

The Nile was low, very low for the season, and the gaunt ribs of brown sand and mud which the receding waters were laying bare stretched here and there in full view in the channel, their low ridges crowned with the marshaled rows of river fowl, sleepily digesting their morning catch of fish.

Around these miniature sandy islets the shallow current of the river swept muddily, and in other places the ripple and quiver of the torrent revealed the presence of submerged shoals that formed a constant menace to navigation.

It was on one of these submerged bars that the *Amenothes II* lay stranded. Stranding had become the boat's habit. On her leisurely course up the Nile, since the night when Sternberg and Lawson had sat in the lee of the deck house and wandered

their conversation from Von Schrimm to mystery, stranding had followed stranding with monotonous regularity, and even the most vigilant use of the *medreh* in the hands of the Egyptian pilot seemed powerless to read the soundings in time to prevent disaster.

"Oh, the devil!" Lawson muttered again.

He glared savagely at the toiling efforts of the native crew. The prospect of another long delay in the hot sun rankled upon him.

Truth to tell, Lawson was tiring of the Nile and of Egypt. The first novelty and interest had long since worn off, and the repeated gazing upon piles of half obliterated ruins and alleged "wonderful" carvings which to his disenchanted eye seemed to resemble the crude scrawlings of untaught children more than anything else, had begun to pall upon him.

There were other causes, too, which conspired to render him heartily sick of the trip.

One of these was Von Schrimm—polite, learned and irreproachable as ever, but clothed now, almost against Lawson's will, with the haunting suggestion of suspicion which Sternberg's words had thrown upon him.

Once—only once—did he attempt to broach the matter to his wife, and the burst of amused laughter with which she met his blundering remarks banished his half-formed doubts and forbade a repetition of the matter.

"Why, George, you dear stupid old goose!" she laughed, playfully pulling his head toward her and planting a kiss upon the tip of his nose; "I believe you are jealous of poor old Von Schrimm. You are simply ridiculous. Why, the poor fellow's heart is as petrified and musty as his knowledge. You know perfectly well that he can talk of nothing but Egypt all the time. Honestly I don't like him—his eyes are creepy—but I feel sorry for him. He seems so lonesome, and no one else appears to take much interest in his stories. Besides, you must remember how good he was in Cairo. It would be awfully insulting to cut him now. Jealous of Von Schrimm? Why, you silly boy, you might as well be jealous of a mummy."

And thus the only attempt that Lawson ever made to put his disquieting doubts into words ended in laughs and kisses. He and his wife had been married less than a year. They were both young and both very much in love with each other.

Nevertheless it was hard to preserve the old friendly attitude toward Von Schrimm, and as Lawson leaned upon the rail watching the scurryings of the crew, who were putting out anchors in the attempt to haul the boat off, he found himself wishing fervently that they were to put about that very day and begin the return journey toward Cairo.

A hand laid upon his arm brought him suddenly to himself. He turned to find the figure of his wife beside him, her face shining with interest and excitement.

"Such luck!" she cried gleefully. "The best thing that this horrid old steamer has ever done! Selim says it is quite possible we may be aground here for two or three days. The captain is just going off to the next village to ask the *Omdeh* for help and reinforcements, and in the meantime a party is being made up to go ashore and visit some awfully interesting old tombs and things that Von Schrimm knows of near here. Selim is going ashore with the captain and will arrange to get donkeys and everything from the village. The tombs lie quite a way out on the desert. Of course we will go too—won't we?"

She squeezed his arm persuasively.

"Oh, I suppose so," he said, looking down on her with a smile. "I don't mind seeing a lot more badly

done scrawls and a fresh batch of snub-nosed images if it pleases you. It will be better than rotting here in the mud, anyway."

"But these are different," she protested. "Von Schrimm says that the place is very seldom visited. It lies out of the regular track of tourists, you see. And there aren't so very many things to see, either, only some partly explored tombs, but the great charm of it is that the place is more or less unknown yet. We might find all sorts of interesting things."

"We might even find some genuine old relics—made in Birmingham," he suggested sarcastically, "or a piece of 'genuine' mummy cloth that your donkey boy has thoughtfully hidden in a hole—just where you are certain to find it. Never mind, we'll go anyhow."

And they went.

Von Schrimm and Selim, the dragoman, headed the little procession of riders and baggage animals that struck off into the desert.

Von Schrimm had become the man of the hour. The expedition had been of his suggestion, and besides, excepting for Selim, who had heard of the place, and Sternberg, the Austrian, who kept his counsel to himself and said nothing, none of the others in the party had the faintest idea as to where they were going.

They spent the night on the desert, in the shelter of two or three scraggy palms beside a half-forgotten native well, from which they hauled precious bucketfuls of the scanty, weird-smelling water for the thirsty donkeys.

Next day the march was resumed at an easy pace, and toward evening, passing over the edge of a dip in the desert, they came in sight of an outcropping ridge of tawny rock, the edge of a small, bare, low-lying plateau, rising above the sandy desolation that stretched around, the rocky face of it glowing cinnamon and dun in the slanting rays of the declining sun

Von Schrimm raised his whip and pointed.

"Behold!" he cried; "the Hill of the Dead—one of the most ancient burial places in all Egypt and the only one that has managed to guard most of its secrets."

A murmur of curiosity and expectation from the dusty lips of his hearers followed his announcement. With renewed speed they pushed onward, and by nightfall had pitched their camp among the broken ground at the foot of the cliff, in the very loom of the cavernous indentations which the wasting passage of unnumbered centuries had worn in the face of the age-scarred rock.

"Well, what do you think of it?" said Lawson speculatively. "I wonder will it prove worth the trouble of coming?"

Sternberg extracted and lit one of his eternal cigarettes before replying. He and Lawson had wandered out a little distance into the desert and stood for a moment surveying the camp and the cliff behind it, lit with the dancing glow of the several tiny fires.

"You will perhaps be disappointed," he answered presently. "There is comparatively little to be seen. A few commonplace tombs, a few mediocre hieroglyphics—that is all."

"You know the place?" questioned Lawson in surprize. "You never mentioned that before."

"Why should I? Is it necessary to parade one's knowledge before the rabble? Yes, I know this place only too well. It was here that Carl Metzer, of Berlin, a personal friend of mine, unaccountably disappeared twenty-five years ago. It was a mysterious affair and has always puzzled me. We were both members of a scientific expedition to this very spot. One night Metzer disappeared from

the camp—vanished as it were into thin air. No trace of him has ever been found. It was in the forlorn hope that I might by chance stumble upon some clue to the mystery—even after all these years—that I took this opportunity to revisit the place."

"And you never found a trace of him?" asked Lawson with interest. "Was there no theory?"

"There were several, but none of them was ever proved. One idea was that some of our Arabs had murdered him and concealed the body. Another theory suggested that he had become suddenly insane in the night and had wandered off into the desert and died somewhere in some hole or hollow. Still another had it that he had strolled into the desert and been carried off and murdered by a roving band of Arabs. Of course these were only theories. We never found the slightest trace of Metzer. All we know is that one night he went to his tent as usual, and in the morning he was gone. We searched everywhere, but the mystery has remained a mystery ever since."

"A strange affair," commented Lawson. "I don't wonder that you take an interest in the place. It is certainly a fit theater for a mystery. The place is dreary and ominous enough for anything."

"Is it not?" Sternberg agreed. "As ominous as its name. Strange, how inanimate objects and localities have a very real atmosphere and personality of their own—but they have. Well, let us return to camp. There is no wisdom in wandering too far."

"You surely don't suggest that there is any danger, do you?"

"Danger? Oh, I don't know," said the Austrian thoughtfully. "I was thinking of Metzer — and other things."

They retraced their steps in silence. Just before they came within earshot of the others Sternberg spoke.

"You will oblige me by saying nothing of what I have told you. I have reasons for not wanting the story to become public property. Good night."

He turned away and departed to the little tent that had been pitched for him on the far edge of the camp.

It was late, and the night was already far advanced when Lawson awoke with that strange premonition of impending evil which will occasionally awaken even the heaviest sleepers.

The camp was silent as the grave: wrapped deep in slumber. Over all brooded the vast stillness of the desert night. But presently a faint air, stirring across the dry sands, began to rustle and scrape the tent flap with the warning of a coming night breeze.

It was this faint, desolate voicing of the tent flap that suddenly jarred Lawson into complete wakefulness with a chill sensation of alarm, sudden as a dash of icy water.

The tent flap was unlaced and stood swaying open.

Lawson sat up suddenly, and as he did so he was aware of another circumstance, which brought him to his feet with a spring.

The other cot, which his wife had occupied, was disordered and vacant. He was alone.

A creeping shiver, like a drafty blast of cold air, ran down his spine at the realization. For an instant his heart stood still; and in that instant, while he stood paralyzed and irresolute, a dark form blotted across the tent opening, and a voice that he recognized as Sternberg's came in a hoarse, tense whisper from without:

"Lawson! Quick, man, quick! Don't waste a second or it may be too late. Come!"

In the Austrian's voice there was a compelling intensity that called for instant, unquestioning compliance. Lawson tore on his boots, and, clad

as he was in his sleeping garments, stepped out into the starlight.

Sternberg caught his arm with iron grip. The Austrian was fully dressed and was laboring under some violent excitement.

"Come," he repeated, almost breathlessly. "Don't attempt to ask questions; follow me. And remember—whatever you see or hear, say nothing; do nothing, or *it* may kill her. Do you understand? Leave everything to me. Remember your silence is the only hope of her safety. A false movement—a cry—may mean her instant death."

He turned and led the way into the darkness, moving with long, noiseless, nervous strides.

They passed swiftly beyond the area of the camp and began to pick their way among the broken ground at the foot of the rocks, Sternberg leading among the rocks and shadows with the instinct and agility of a panther. Far out on the desert the quavering wail of a lone jackal broke the silence with a note that froze the blood in Lawson's veins. He followed, stumbling and breathless, in the footsteps of his guide.

Suddenly Sternberg paused.

"Ssst!" he breathed. "Look!"

Directly ahead, on a shoulder of rising ground that stretched from the base of the cliff, Lawson was aware of two figures emerging slowly from a band of shadow and making their way directly toward the base of the towering rocks.

It was his wife and Von Schrimm.

Lawson felt the hand of Sternberg close hard upon his wrist as a reminder of his warning. Silently, cautiously, they followed, hugging the deeper shadows and drawing closer with each step to the slowly moving pair ahead.

Von Schrimm was in the lead. He was moving with deliberate certainty, as of one who follows a well known path. His head was half turned and his eyes were fixed, not upon the way of his feet, but upon the face of the woman who followed.

And she was following him stiffly, mechanically, with the dull lethargy of a sleep-walker. Her head was thrown back, and the masses of her unbound hair fell in a cloud about her shoulders, stirring and waving in the light desert wind that fluttered the folds of the long dark cloak which she had thrown over her night attire. Her hands were clasped upon her breast, gathering and holding her cloak about her, and over the rough, rocky surface of the ground her bare feet moved steadily and apparently without sensation, gleaming palely beneath the fluttering hem of her long white gown.

Von Schrimm was bareheaded, but save for this he was fully dressed. He kept moving steadily forward, and from his lips came at intervals a low sound, an indescribable purring note that had something of a hiss in it.

And the girl followed him, involuntarily, apparently powerless. Only once did she appear to halt and hesitate, and in that moment, despite the hand that Sternberg clapped suddenly over his mouth, Lawson came near to emitting a shriek of terror.

For, the instant she paused, Von Schrimm halted and drew himself to his full height. The purring note rose to an angry hiss. His right arm swept aloft, and, gripped in the upraised hand, gleamed a long, broad-bladed dagger, poised menacingly, the starlight glittering coldly upon the cruel savage length of steel. The girl shivered mechanically and once more moved forward.

The beads of cold sweat broke out in a rain over Lawson's body. Trembling in every limb he was conscious of the fierce whisper of Sternberg in his ear: "Fool! If *it* suspects your presence it will slay her on the instant. Silence, if you value her life."

Upon a narrow platformlike space, where the shoulder of the ridge butted against the face of the cliff, Von Schrimm paused beside a gigantic boulder, a great fragment of stone that had apparently fallen from above and now lay wedged securely against the face of the parent rock behind it. He began to work with straining muscles upon the stone, and as he worked the girl beside him stood motionless—a rigid, pale-faced statue, lifeless as marble.

Slowly, steadily, under Von Schrimm's pressure the great fragment moved upon an invisible pivot. Inch by inch it swung and yawned away from the cliff, until finally, when the toiler desisted from his efforts, it stood open like some titanic door, the tremendous shutter of the narrow opening which loomed dark black against the living rock behind.

Von Schrimm turned and faced the motionless girl. Once more he raised the cold length of naked steel. Once more the angry hiss broke from his lips, and as she moved toward him he stepped backward. Together they vanished into the yawning mouth of the tomb.

Sternberg dragged Lawson swiftly forward. Trembling with the excitement and terror that was upon them both, they passed from the darkness of the night into the blacker darkness of the sepulcher.

The characteristic musty breath of a closed burial chamber smote upon their nostrils as they crossed the portal, but the air was not nearly so thick and choking as is usual in a first-opened tomb. There seemed to be a ventilation shaft somewhere, for as they noiselessly followed the sound of shuffling footsteps into the blackness, the faint air of the desert followed them, driving back and clearing the heavy atmosphere.

That there was such a shaft shortly became established. The floor of the passage was smooth and trended downward, and as they advanced the gloom began to lighten until at a point it thinned to the dim radiance of the outer night. In the roof of the rock-hewn gallery a great shaft led upward to the outer air. The light of stars fell into the passage, illuminating it with a pale twilight like that which reigns at the bottom of a deep well.

In the center of this dim patch of hazy darkness they were presently aware that Von Schrimm and his companion had halted. The black blotch of their figures was just visible in the half light.

Then came the sound of a voice. Von Schrimm was speaking, and the voice in which he spoke was his and yet not his—there was a terrible vibration in it which quivered upon the listeners' ears, awakening a sensation of insane fear.

"I have come back," rang that grim, compelling voice. "Through the length of the deathless ages of the past I have come back for thee, O thou from whom the dwellers of the shadows tore my soul. O radiant princess, royal mate of my throne, sharer of my destiny! O thou who wast the assigned partner of my spirit from that first hour when we were flung together from the flaming center of the birth of Time. I have come back.

"Dost thou not remember me, O my partner of eternity? Turn back, turn back thy memory upon itself Rememberest thou those evenings when we rode together into the glow of bloody sunsets, the dust clouds of the desert rising beneath the feet of our victorious hosts, the shadows of the night ringing with the clanking fetters of our captives? Rememberest thou those evenings upon the Nile, those evenings of our burning, blinding love? Those evenings when the moon rose above the desert to silver the dark river and the frowning loom of our ramparts; when the silence

was unbroken save for the murmur of the rowers and the splashing water of the oar blades? Rememberest thou not the whole glorious march of our twain destiny; of our eternal love? That destiny from which in a night I was flung headlong by the awful dwellers of the void? O mate of my living soul, dost thou not remember?"

And hollow and tense and fearful came the low-breathed answer: "I remember."

"Long have I sought thee," continued that terrible voice. "Long ages has my slain soul pursued thee through the trackless mazes of the lightless dark of that dread region of the lost. But always thou fled from me in horror. Thy living soul shrank from the embraces of my dead spirit, and always thou fled safe from me, protected by that great barrier which holds dead from living. Long have I yearned for thee in vain, but now I fail no longer. Into my hands has come the key of victory. Once more art thou within the pale of my power, O long-lost partner of my soul! Dead is my soul and dead shall thine accompany me, to the borders of that dark river which rolls its waters through the dying ages toward oblivion. Come!"

The awful voice rose to a shriek, and as the sound of its last word rang upon the rocky roof, a blaze of light sprang from the electric torch in Sternberg's hand, followed an instant later by two spurts of duller flame; the savage double report of the Austrian's Luger echoed through the tomb; the ejected shells from the automatic bounded from the wall and fell tinkling upon the passage floor.

In the flooding glare of the blinding light the form of Von Schrimm stood for an instant fully revealed, leaning forward with hungry, clutching arms toward the trembling figure before him, his face transfigured with an expression of devilish triumph such as never sat upon human features.

One instant only he stood thus, and then, as the powerful expanding bullets tore their way through that hideous leering countenance, he reeled and fell backward, headlong and alone, into the depths of a yawning chasm behind, which his devilish machinations had destined for both.

LAWSON rushed forward and caught the collapsing body of his wife in his arms. The strained tension that had held her so long in thrall had snapped. They carried her, fainting, unnerved and sobbing, out beyond the entrance and laid her in the cool air beside the doorway.

The Austrian turned back. "I have work to do in here which it will be too late to do tomorrow," he said. "Stay here and look after her. Wait until I come."

He re-entered the tomb, swinging the light of his pocket torch before him.

He was a long while gone, and when he returned he was dusty and grimy and hot with exertion. He was in no mood for talk, and Lawson, supporting his wife's head in his arms, watched him silently as he slowly swung back that titanic door of rock which for centuries unnumbered had closed and guarded the secret of the tomb behind it.

The girl had fallen into a strange deep slumber, and presently, when he had completed his task, the Austrian came and stood looking down at her.

"It is well," he said at length. "The strain has been terrific and she may remain asleep thus for hours, but she will be normal when she wakes, and I do not think she will have the slightest recollection of the whole affair."

"Are you sure?" queried Lawson anxiously.

"Almost. I have seen somewhat similar cases of great mental strain,

and it has always left complete forgetfulness of the circumstance. Meanwhile, since I may not be able to talk to you afterward for some time, you had better know what is in there."

He indicated the closed tomb.

"What did you do with the body?"

"There was *no* body," said the Austrian steadily, "at least not the kind of body you are thinking of. There was a mummy there in an unopened sarcophagus. I smashed the mummy to bits," he added. "It was a choking, loathsome job."

"But the corpse of Von Schrimm?" cried Lawson. "What did you do with *that?*"

"There was *no* corpse of Von Schrimm," repeated the Austrian. "There *never was* a Von Schrimm. There is nothing in there but the twenty-five-years-dead skeleton of Carl Metzer, dressed in a new suit of clothes, and with two Luger bullets through its skull."

"My God!" cried Lawson. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Sternberg solemnly, "that the mystery of Metzer's disappearance is a mystery no longer. He must have wandered in his sleep that night, twenty-five years ago, to the edge of the shaft where it opens upon the plateau above, and fallen in. The terrible being which haunted the tomb seized the opportunity of taking possession of Metzer's body, and for all these years it has occupied it, changing its very features with its own personality and holding the form together by the sheer strength of its own purpose. The moment it lost its grip the body vanished, nothing but the skeleton remaining, as would have been the case in the natural course of events."

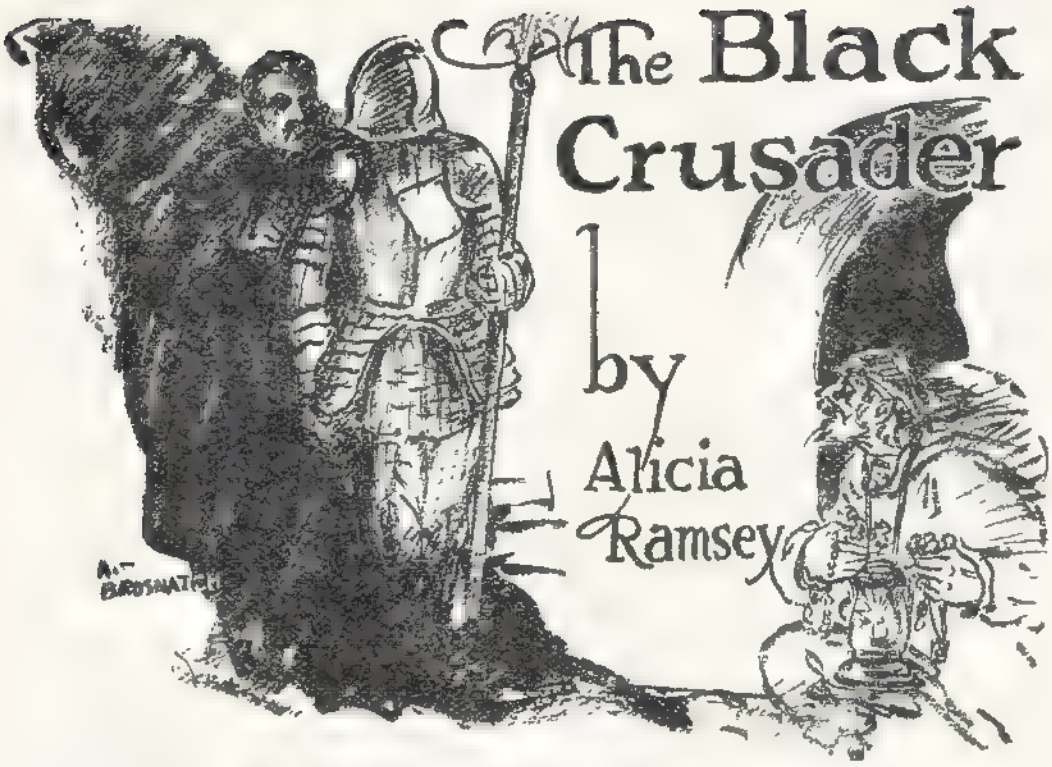
"Oh, my God!" cried Lawson in horror. "I can't believe it! I can't! It's too ghastly!"

"There is not the slightest possibility of doubt," returned Sternberg mercilessly. "Metzer once broke his leg and it was unskilfully set. The fracture shows quite plainly on the skeleton. Besides, I found this upon the *thing*. It's a wonder that I never noticed it before, because I have had a suspicion of this ghastly business from the beginning and I have watched what you called 'Von Schrimm' very closely."

He held out a gold watch and snapped open the case in the glare of the torch.

"Carl Metzer," ran the engraved inscription, surrounded by a wreath of laurel.

"You see there is no doubt," said the Austrian, snapping shut the case. "Come. It is time we were starting back. She will have to be carried quietly and gently, remember, and we must get back without observation some way or other. In the morning there will be a fine outcry over Von Schrimm's disappearance; and there will be official investigations and no end of red tape. But remember, keep your counsel and breathe no word. The wind is rising, our footprints in the sand will be obliterated in a few minutes. No trace of this night's business will remain. The fate of Von Schrimm and the secret of that dead *thing* in the tomb is hid for ever. Come, let us go."



The Black Crusader

by Alicia Ramsey

THE Black Crusader lay taking his rest beneath his canopy of stone, while the death bell in the belfry rang out his solemn farewell to the last but one of his race.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The sound shuddered out on the still night air. The owls, disturbed from their rest, circled round the belfry screeching their weird litany to the dead. The villagers, plodding wearily homeward, wondered to each other if the Squire's son would be home in time for the funeral the next day. But the Sexton tolling the bell, looked at the Black Crusader and laughed.

In the center of the church lay the Squire. Four tapers, sleepless sentinels with eyes of fire, stood at his head and feet. A pall of imperial purple covered his face. The perfume of the flowers he had loved filled the church with their silent tribute to the dead.

In the darkness beyond, five men—white shadows silhouetted against a circle of flickering light—moved to and fro preparing the bed of perishable stone for its occupant of imperishable dust. The shuffling of their feet and hoarse whispering rose and fell with the falling of their pick-axes and the clanging of the bell.

For one more night the Squire would take his rest among the living. On the morrow he would take his place among his forefathers by the Black Crusader's side.

The Black Crusader was the remote and glorious founder of the Squire's own race. The dusty folios in the Squire's library proved conclusively that he had been a great and grand, if not a good and virtuous man. He had thieved and stolen, and rollicked and squandered and rioted with the best. He had drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs, then, at the right hand of King Richard, he had crossed the seas to fight for his King, his country and his God. In the land of the pagan and the sun, he, who was

set so high, had fallen to the dust. He had taken the oath of the Crusader. He broke his oath. He returned to England, renounced the world, gave himself up to religion, and built the Norman church as a penance for his sin. By his will, he ordained that as a punishment to all time, his effigy should be carved in black and a cloak should cover the mouth which had forsworn his God.

No one knew what the Black Crusader's temptation had been, nor did history record his sin. The secret lay locked behind his lips of stone. It was known only to the dead who slept by the Black Crusader's side, to the Squire who lay taking his rest, and to the Sexton who laughed as he tolled the bell.

Boom! Boom! Boom! There was a sound of wrenching, of lifting, of straining, of gasping . . . . then silence. The chipping of the mason's pick-axes ceased with the crying of the bell. The men standing in a circle, mopped the sweat from their foreheads as they called softly to the Sexton that their work was done. In another instant, the Sexton emerged from the darkness and stood by the masons' side.

He was a queer-looking man, was the Sexton. His face was white. His hair was red. On the top of his red hair he wore a skull cap of red cloth. When he looked down he looked like a little child. When he looked up he looked like a devil; all the wickedness of the world seemed to have found a home in his malicious eyes.

"Is it all ready?" said he.

"Ay, Sexton," replied the head mason. "Everything be in readiness. It be toime for we to go."

"In that case," said the Sexton, "I'll let you out."

"Bean't you coming with we, Sexton?" said the head mason.

"Later," said the Sexton briefly, "when my work is done."

The men picked up their tools, shouldered their bags and shuffled down the aisle. At the door they paused. "Bean't you skeered to stay here alone, Sexton?" said the head mason, jerking his thumb in the direction of the dead Squire.

"Not I," said the Sexton. "Why should I be afraid? There is no one living to harm me and the dead." He watched the masons down the road, then he closed the door and went back into the church.

Swiftly, noiselessly, shielding the lamp in his hand with a fold of his gown, the Sexton went up the aisle and peered down at the Black Crusader's tomb. The canopy of fretted stonework remained, but the bed with its recumbent figure of stone was gone. The Black Crusader, on his feet once more, stood leaning against the wall.

By the flickering light of the lamp one could count the steps which led down to the vault below. There they lay sleeping: countless descendants of the Black Crusader, countless forefathers of the sleeping Squire, each in the house assigned to him, with his name, his age, and his virtues set forth upon his door. There they lay sleeping, an unbroken chain of dust linking the honored present to the glorious past. But a little hour ago, they had been hidden; unheard by the most acutely sensitive ear, unseen by the most discriminating eye. Tomorrow, they would be hidden again, their slumbers guarded by the founder of their race . . . . but tonight! Tonight! Gone was their guardian; open stood their door. The dead were free to receive the living, should one desire to enter their house of stone.

The Sexton turned away from the vault, lifted his lantern and looked at the Black Crusader leaning against the wall. The light fell on the burnished plate nailed to the Black

Crusader's breast with its fantastic legend:

> Whoe'er this tomb shall spoil for pelf
> Shall toll his funeral bell himself.

The Sexton looked into the Black Crusader's eyes and laughed.

"Tonight," he whispered, "tonight!" Then he went down the aisle into the body of the church.

By the side of the sleeping Squire he paused and with a steady hand raised the pall and gazed down into the waxen face.

"I've waited for eight long years," he said, "but tonight is my turn. Eight long years have been yours. But tonight is mine! Tonight!" The Sexton let the pall fall back again over the waxen face and laughed. "Tonight," he whispered. "Tonight!"

The Sexton shut the door of the church and went out into the dark.

THE Sexton's home was a little cottage quite near the church. He had lived in it ever since he had come to the little village of Ampthill twenty years before. For twenty years "Ginger Geoff," as the villagers called him, had lived in their midst, eaten with them, drunk with them, dug their graves and tolled their funeral knell. Where he came from, who he was, nobody knew. He arrived one day in the little place, ordered himself a glass of beer at the little public house and enquired as to the possibility of work. The place of Sexton chanced to be going a-begging, and "Ginger Geoff" had interviewed the Squire and obtained the post. A day later, he had shifted his poor belongings to the little cottage set apart for the Sexton's use, and within a week was as well known as the oldest inhabitant of the place.

There was a good deal of curiosity evinced about the Sexton, not only on his arrival but during the whole of his life. He was one of those men who at once attract and repel attention and whet the appetite of imagination by allowing it to starve. The villagers, honest, commonplace folk, resenting the intrusion into their midst of a personality so foreign to their own, summed him up in the one word "queer." The visitors whom he showed over the Norman church, noting his delicate hands and the unexpected refinement of his speech, dismissed him as a man who had seen better days. But to villagers and visitors alike the Sexton said never a word. Even in his cups he contrived to hold his tongue.

There were many visitors to the Norman church. Its architecture was unique, its stained glass a revelation, the view from the belfry unsurpassed, and the tomb of the Black Crusader, with its quaint legend, full of old-world charm.

Before the coming of the Sexton, the story of the Black Crusader had been looked upon as quite an ordinary thing, but "Ginger Geoff" had seized upon possibilities of that historical worthy and turned him to good account. The Squire, good, easy man, flattered in his pride of race by the Sexton's interest, had readily granted him free access to the necessary books. A little pamphlet concerning the Black Crusader was the outcome of the Sexton's researches, which, done into print by the Squire's command, obtained a ready sale at sixpence amongst the hundreds of people, who, during the year, found their way to the little village of Ampthill to gaze at and speculate upon the Black Crusader's tomb.

What was the meaning of the legend? What was the "pelf" he sought so jealously to guard that he encompassed it around with bulwarks of fear? Was it hidden treasure of deeds and documents, or was it heaped-up spoil of jewels and gold?

All asked. None knew. Only the Black Crusader and his brothers in

their house of stone; the Squire lying alone guarded by sentinels of fire; and the Sexton who laughed as he walked down the road in the night.

He knew. It was not for nothing that he had pored all those dreary hours over the Squire's musty, dusty books. He knew. He had known for eight years. For eight long years he had waited for a chance to turn his knowledge into account. Death had put his chance into his hands tonight.

As he walked along the road in the darkness, the Sexton began to think. His thoughts were as full of darkness as the night. He thought of the injustice of men's laws which had handicaped him from his birth. He thought of an unhappy childhood, of a treacherous wife, of blighted aspirations, of a withering heart. He thought of the growing lust for gold which had become the master passion of his life.

Gold! How he loved it! How he thirsted for it! How he had starved for it! How he had sat the livelong night crooning over it, talking to it, caressing it, kissing it with the passion of a mother for her new-born child. How he loved to feel the shining pieces slipping through his hands; his hands which were like a woman's for all his digging, supple and soft and white. A miser's hands, so a gipsy girl had once told him at a fair. Recalling the memory, the Sexton looked down at his hands in the darkness and laughed. He was merry tonight, was the Sexton. How should he be otherwise than merry? Had he not waited for eight long years? Had not his chance come to him at last?

The sleeping villagers, the lonely church, the open vault, the secret knowledge, the hidden gold!

Why only gold? Why not jewels? Barbaric emeralds, uncut rubies, pearls beyond price! All waiting! Their shining hidden away in the darkness; waiting to come to him.

How much? How much? That was the question. Hundreds! thousands! tens of thousands! millions! A little courage, a little will, and tomorrow he could sit alone in the darkness and lave his thirsting hands, not in a meager pool of sovereigns, but in a burning sea of gold.

Like the stars in the shadowed firmament above him, the thought of the hidden treasure blazed across the darkness of the Sexton's thoughts.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight!"

The Sexton counted the sweet notes as they died away in the still night air. Eight o'clock. That meant another four hours, for he meant to wait till 12. At 12 the world was asleep—at 12 the ghost of gold should arise and walk—at 12 the grave would give up her dead.

As the Sexton crossed the threshold of his cottage—a Crœsus' palace in his dreams,—for the last time in his life the Sexton laughed.

Over the untasted food and wine sat the eldest son of the dead Squire. His boots were muddy; his hands were soiled; his face was white. Four sleepless days and nights he had been on his way; now he had come only in time to hear, for all his hasting, he was three days too late. The father he had loved and honored was gone, and his son, a most unwilling heir, reigned in his stead.

The new Squire pushed aside his untasted plate, looked across at the empty chair which henceforth he would be the one to fill, and his fancy conjured up for him the kindly face, the sparkling eye, the welcoming hand. Too late! too late! And he had gone out into the darkness and the silence, calling for his son. The new Squire covered his face with his hands and cried like a little child.

Upstairs, the weeping women went about their tasks; downstairs, the servants huddled in the kitchen were

already planning for the break-up of the old home. In the library, with papers and pens, the lawyer waited the pleasure of the new Squire.

Let him wait. Tomorrow would be time enough to hear of the mortgaged lands, the failing crops, the necessary sale, the passing of the dear old home into strangers' hands. Tomorrow belonged to them, tonight belonged to *him*.

The new Squire rose up in his place and summoned the butler who had known him from a child. "Tell Mr. Creighton not to wait any longer," he said. "I can't see anyone tonight."

"But it's so important, Master John," said the old man, the familiar name of boyhood slipping across his trembling lips.

"I can't help that," said the master. "Nothing is so important that it can't wait till morning. I can't stay any longer in the house, James, the place stifles me. I'm going back to him."

"But you've been with him already, Master John," said the old man. "You mustn't go back again. You're tired. You're ill. He'd be the first to tell you not to go if he could speak."

"I must," said the Squire. "It's the last chance I shall ever have of spending a few hours by his side."

"Then I'll come with you," said the old man.

"No," said the Squire. "I must go alone."

As he moved toward the door, the old man threw himself in his way. "Let me go with you, Master John. You mustn't go alone. Look——" And he pointed with a trembling finger to the clock.

"A quarter to 12," said the Squire. "What of that?"

"Wait at least till the hour has struck," entreated the old man. "You know what the folks say round about here, Master John," his voice dropped to a whisper, "that at 12 the Black Crusader walks."

The young man threw off the servant's detaining hand with a gesture of contempt. "What do you think *he'd* say if he heard you talking such rubbish as that?"

For an instant servant and master looked at each other, then the old man opened the door. "If it must be, sir, it must. I'll wait up till you come back."

The young Squire caught up a hat, threw a coat over his arm, and went into the night.

The air struck chill, summer though it was, and the young man shivered as he picked his way across the lawn. He slipped his arm into the coat. To his surprize, fumble as he might, he could find no sleeve. It came to him like a flash that he'd taken his father's cape. He wrapped it round his shoulders with a sensation so acute it almost seemed like the touch of the dead man's hand. "Dear father," thought he, "how often I've laughed at you for wearing this shabby old cloak, and now I'm wearing it and you're not here to laugh at me."

Softly he let himself into the church by the vestry door with the little key which the Vicar had left up at the Hall in case he arrived and wanted to use it that night. Softly he walked up the narrow aisle, softly he lifted the pall, softly he bent down and kissed the waxen face of the dead man. "Why didn't you wait a little longer, Dad?" said he. "Just a few hours longer, that at least we might have said good-bye." He slipped his warm, young hand under the pall and laid it tenderly on the ice-cold fingers of the dead man and knelt down by his side.

How long he knelt there he never knew. Was it a moment? Was it an hour? In looking back afterward, it seemed to him as if he had knelt there for all eternity. Exhausted with want of food, tired out with want of sleep,

as he knelt there, he lost all consciousness of everything, save that he held his father's hand. The present seemed to slip away from him. The future did not exist. Only the past was real, —the past alive with the spirit of the dead man. Half-forgotten memories of childhood's days, tender, familiar names long since fallen into disuse, idle words, merry laughter, all rose and lived again. How they had ridden forth in the morning among the glad fields and the gay flowers. How they had played together in the moon. How, when the twilight had fallen, they had sat side by side in the great hall watching the firelight leaping into flame, while the elder told the younger stories of the men and women of their race. How he had slipped his little hand into the protecting father hand, even as now,—the same, yet not the same,—and from that safe stronghold had challenged fear lurking in the shadowy corners while they spoke of the Black Crusader and whispered mysteriously together of the possible treasures in his tomb.

The Black Crusader!

The young Squire lifted his head and listened. What was that noise?

Something had moved. Something had stirred. What could it be?

The owls in the belfry, rats in the vaults, or James, despite his fears and his master's instructions, come to fetch him home.

He held his breath and listened.

Silence. The awful, terrible, terrifying silence of death.

Not a movement. Not a sound. It was his own overstrung imagination. His own over-excited brain. And yet again, something moving. *There was someone in the church.*

In an instant the young Squire was on his feet. To his surprize he found that he had suddenly no breath. His heart was fluttering like a mad thing in his breast. His eyes searching out the darkness were suddenly blind. His ears, strained in an agony of expectation, were suddenly deaf. Putting his hand to his forehead he found it was quite wet.

What was it? Who was it? In such a place, at such an hour? Who, or *what?*

A third time, and this time there was no mistake. The young Squire turned his head in the direction of the noise and saw a spot of light. With a shock that brought the blood to his face, it came to him that the light was burning in the Black Crusader's tomb.

With a sudden revulsion of feeling the young Squire looked down at his dead father and smiled.

Of course it must be the masons who were still at work. And yet . . . . at work at 12 o'clock at night, with the church doors locked! Who had given them permission to stay so late? If the doors were locked, who had let them in? If they were working preparing the vault for the next day, why did they make no sound?

And yet . . . . there was the light; burning, flickering, moving, as if someone down below were carrying it about. Probably the Sexton, overcautious man, come back to see that everything was right. And yet . . . . so late . . . . The Squire caught his breath sharply; the light went out.

Darkness! Silence! Death! No light save the tapers burning, no sound save the beating of his own heart, no human presence except himself and the dead man.

Had he been asleep or had his overwrought imagination played him false? Yet, but an instant ago, the light had been, and now the light was not. The young man's nerves strained to stretching point, began to go. Then his eyes fell on the dead man's face, and the tension of his own relaxed.

"You wouldn't believe it if I told you," he thought, "but it's true all the same, dear old dad. *I'm afraid!*"

He turned his head sharply. The light was burning again. In an instant all the young Squire's hesitation had vanished. Whoever it was, whatever it was, he must see, he must know. He stooped down, unlaced his boots, drew his father's cape more closely about him, and in his stockinged feet slipped noiselessly up the church.

There was the yawning darkness. There was the open vault. There was the burning light. For the first time in his life the young Squire looked down into his great forefather's tomb.

A flight of stone steps led to the crypt below. The light, which intermittently shone and disappeared, was not sufficiently bright to allow him to distinguish anything else. One thing only was certain: there was somebody in the vault. Somebody who moved cautiously, who was doing something which he didn't wish to be found out.

He was about to run down the steps when a sudden thought came leaping to his brain. Somebody who knew the legend was taking advantage of the opening of the vault to search for the treasures popularly supposed to be buried in the Black Crusader's tomb!

The mere thought steadied him instantly. At the first suspicion of practical, tangible danger he was his own man again. Shielding his face with his cape, he withdrew into the shade. Alert, his eyes fixed on the shifting light, he stood and leaned his back against the wall.

Silence! maddening, deafening silence, then a sound as of stone falling upon stone and a stifled cry. The young Squire held himself in with a hand of steel not to fling himself headlong down the narrow stairway to see what was going on.

Once again silence, pitiless, aching silence; the silence which seizes a man by his throat and stops the life-blood runnning through his heart. Silence! Then a sound as of falling tears. A strange sound that; this weeping and wailing and sobbing intermingled with another sound as of lovers kissing, then a voice murmuring all the endearing words known to the language of love. Then a sound as of the chinking of gold against gold.

"They have found it," thought the young Squire, in the darkness. "How many of them are there? What had I better do?"

To call for help was useless, to leave was impossible, there was nothing to do but to wait.

One! two! three! At the sounding of the clock all other sound ceased. The light, which for some time had been darkening, as if removed farther into the vault, flashed out brightly for an instant, then settled down to a steady glow as if sheltered by a suddenly cautious hand.

"They are coming at last," thought the Squire, and lifted his cloak across his face. As he did so, his arms struck sharply against the projecting stone; he turned and realized for the first time, he was standing side by side with the Black Crusader, whom the masons had carefully propped against the wall. Even at that moment, the thought thrilled him to the core that he and his great forefather should thus be standing guard side by side.

The light began to move. Slowly someone was coming up the steps. In another second a white face encircled with red hair surmounted by a red cap came into view.

It was "Ginger Geoff."

Up the steps came the Sexton. A lantern was fixed to his breast, a bag was slung across his back, both hands were full to overflowing of precious stones.

For an instant, remembering all his dead father's goodness to the man, a wave of righteous indignation held the young Squire dumb. Then a passion of anger fell upon him and he strode forward to the side of the open vault and stood awaiting the Sexton.

his uplifted arm still unconsciously hiding his face.

"Diamonds and rubies and emeralds," babbled the Sexton softly, "and pearls, pearls of great price! A king's ransom! . . . ."

"Geoffrey," said the Squire.

The Sexton paused on the topmost step and listened intently. His face was alive with fear. "Who spoke?" he whispered hoarsely.

The young Squire stepped out of the shadow into the circle of light. "It is I."

The Sexton stared blindly up into the darkness, then a scream like a wounded animal went echoing through the night. "The Black Crusader!" he screamed. "Save me, save me, save me!" and he rushed wildly into the church.

"You can't escape me like that," cried the Squire, and started in pursuit.

"Save me, save me, save me!" screamed the Sexton. "It's the Black Crusader come to life."

"Stop!" cried the Squire in a voice of thunder. "It is I."

For an instant the Sexton's white face looked backward over his shoulder, then his lamp went out. The whole church lay in darkness save for the four tall tapers around the coffin, sleeping sentinels with guarding eyes of fire.

Up and down, round and round, in and out, the men chased each other, the Sexton's screams in wanton unseemliness disturbing the hallowed slumbers of the dead.

Up and down! round and round! in and out! One instant within a hand's breadth of each other—the next divided almost by the entire length of the church.

A strange sight in good truth! The red-headed, white-faced Sexton, his hands full of jewels, the sack of pilfered treasure looming like a deformity on his rounded back, crouching, springing, running, screaming; and the tall Squire, in stockinged feet, noiselessly tracking him, through the darkness, his dead father's cape billowing behind him like fantastic wings of black.

UP AND down! Round and round! In and out! For a few minutes that seemed like eternities, they ran their race, pursuing and pursued. then, with a movement of unexpected dexterity, the two came face to face.

The young Squire's hand leapt out like lightning to seize the Sexton. The Sexton doubled like a hare and rushed up the belfry stairs. The Squire, uncertain of his whereabouts in the darkness, came to a standstill and called furiously to him to stop.

The belfry was so constructed that it had two flights of stairs. The Sexton's intention on reaching the top was to cross the narrow rat-eaten landing and escape down the other side.

On, on, on. Up, up, up. Gasping, slipping, screaming, with the unerring instinct of the hunted, the Sexton rushed upward in the dark.

Round the corner, across the landing, down the other side.

Creak! CREAK! Creak! The Sexton stopped short in his running, face to face with the young Squire who was coming up shielding a lighted taper with his cape.

"I've got you at last, have I!" cried the Squire.

To the terror-stricken Sexton it was the voice of one risen from the dead. Without an instant's hesitation the Sexton turned and fled back again the way he had come.

Up! Up! Up! Would he never reach the top? Would the steps which his feet had trodden so often never come to an end?

Stumbling, slipping, gasping, screaming, he tore onward like a man pursued by a horrible dream, and ever at his heels closer, closer, the

dreaded presence calling on him to stop.

On! On! On! Up! Up! Up! At last the top!

Half paralyzed with the unwonted exertion, the Sexton steadied himself by the rickety rail, paused for an instant, and looked down. On the next landing beneath him came the glimmer of the pursuing light. Only a few steps divided them. Only a few seconds separated him from the supernatural terror which he dreaded more than death.

To wait and grapple with this dread assailant was impossible. To run any farther was out of the question; he had come to the end of his strength. Where to turn? What to do? How to escape?

Often, to save himself the trouble of climbing the steep stairway, he had let himself down by the rope. At the thought, the Sexton bent eagerly forward in the darkness, and the noose by which he had fixed the bell to the landing that very afternoon after ringing the dead Squire's obsequies struck against his hands, which were full of jewels! Ruling passion strong in death, the miser hand still held them as in a vise.

Stronger than terror, more maddening than fear, came the thought that if he held the rope with his hands he must let the jewels fall.

"I've got you at last, have I?"

Only three steps between him and the Black Crusader!

The Sexton, screaming with terror, slipped his head into the noose and leapt into the dark.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

As the young Squire peered over the rickety railing, petrified with horror, the great bell unloosed from captivity clanged out the first notes of the Sexton's funeral knell.

So the legend fulfilled itself.

When the people aroused by the ringing came rushing in from the vicarage, they found the young Squire standing like a man in a dream, watching the body of the dead Sexton caught in a noose of his own making, slowly swinging to and fro.

McGill's Appointment

By ELSIE ELLIS

"Flighty" McGill entered the warden's office and saluted him.

"McGill," said Warden Fowles, "you seem very anxious to get a parole this week."

"Yes, sir, I am," said McGill.

"You say you have an appointment to keep outside?" said the warden.

"Yes, sir."

"Will you tell me just what sort of appointment it is?"

"It's pretty—personal, sir."

"Hm. You wanted to get out so you could get to the city tonight, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Hm. Well, I have an idea what you wanted to do when you got out," said the warden.

There was a touch of malignity in his voice. He reached for the telephone.

"You're not going to get parole today, or for twenty years, McGill," he said. "You can make up your mind to that."

"I had about done so, sir," said McGill. "You see, sir, we inside hear at least a little about what happens outside."

"Take that chair," ordered the warden roughly.

The clock said 9, and the moonlight that fell for honest people lay on the floor of the office like a lake. McGill looked at it and smiled faintly. Then a spasm crossed his face; his appointment was at 9. McGill gripped the arms of his chair tightly, seemed to pray for a moment, and then the warden saw him rest his forehead on his hands.

THE connection the warden wanted was made.

"Here is District Attorney Downey," said the operator.

The warden heard the voice of his friend at the other end of the hundred-mile circuit.

"Hello, Jim," he said, "this is George."

"Hello!" The voice was nervous. "What's been done?"

"About your wedding anniversary, Jim?"

"Yes. Did he—did he get the parole?"

"Well, it came from the board all right; McGill's conduct reports have been perfect. But I fixed it up. We have our own little system here."

"Funny, George, but I feel as if he were on his way here now. You heard about the note I got?"

"No. Not from McGill?"

"Yes. It said that he was going to keep his appointment on time, but that he was coming to me instead of to Judith. I never could understand what she could see in that fellow, George. But if we hadn't arranged his little trip she'd have married *him*, not *me*. I'm a bit afraid of him. He swore that neither jail nor hell would keep him away. The five years are up tonight at 9, and it's just 9 now. I tell you I have a feeling . . . that he's coming back."

"Nonsense, Jim, old boy. I don't know how the devil he got that letter through, but there's not a bit of a chance of his getting there to—what was it, choke you? He's sitting right here now, not ten feet from me——"

"George!" The cry was one of more than human fright. "George! What's that you say? Who's sitting there—not ten feet——"

"Why, McGill, of course——"

"George! McGill. . . ."

There was a gasping sound.

"McGill's sitting right here, Jim, as quiet as a lamb. We've been working him pretty hard. Looks as if he'd gone to sleep. . . . Hello!! Hello! Hello, there, Jim! Hello, Jim! Operator! Hello! Hello! Hello!"

THERE was a strange silence at the other end of the line, and then there was the sound of someone breathing hard. Something struck the telephone instrument. There was a shriek, and the wire was quiet.

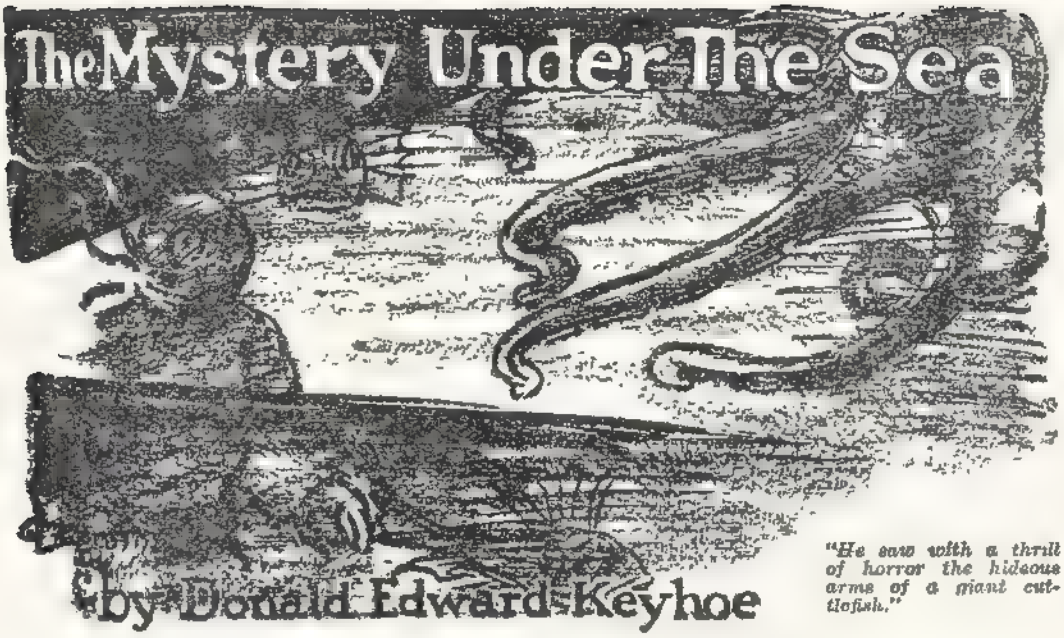
The warden was working the receiver hook wildly. Someone's voice came to his ear. There was a murmuring, and someone spoke into the telephone.

"Hello!" cried the warden. "This is Warden Fowles. What's the matter with Jim—Mr. Downey?"

"Don't know exactly, sir. We just found him lying here. He seems to have been choked to death, sir. We can't find anyone——"

Fowles sprang across the room. McGill's lifeless hand held a vial from the prison hospital labeled "laudanum."

The Mystery Under The Sea



"He saw with a thrill of horror the hideous arms of a giant cuttlefish."

by Donald Edwards Keyhoe

CAPTAIN BURNHAM, communication officer of Flight "L" at Guam, shot an irritated glance at the clock on the wall of the aviation radio shack.

"Four-thirty," he growled to the operator on watch. "It's time 3591 was back and secured at her buoy. Just my luck on transport day to be on duty; Steele and Conroy never come in on time if they can fly around a ship and show off before some pretty woman."

The operator bent over his key to hide a broad smile.

"I'll call the plane again, Captain," he answered. "They haven't sent in any word for thirty-five minutes; they might be down with a dead motor."

"They could taxi in on the other," retorted Burnham. "The sea's as calm as——"

The roar of the motor generator broke in on his words.

"F - 35 . . . F - 35 . . ." flashed the call for more than two minutes. Then the operator switched on his receiver.

"No answer," he reported after an interval. "Do you think we'd better send out——"

He stopped suddenly and, seizing a pad and pencil, began to write rapidly. At the startled look which came over his face Burnham leaped up and bent over the hastily scrawled words.

"I've cut in on a message to the governor," whispered the man at the desk tensely. "It's from the transport. 'Marine Corps flying boat 3591 found abandoned twelve miles from Guam, bearing 250 degrees. No sign of pilots or crew; plane apparently in good condition. Motors still warm. Request permission to continue to Manila without standing by. J. A. Hartley, Commanding U. S. Army Transport *Sherman*.'"

"My God!" cried Burnham, aghast. "Abandoned! It's impossible; there must be some mistake. Steele would never desert a plane unless it sank under him."

The operator stared at him helplessly.

"There's no mistake, sir. Captain Hartley wouldn't send a message like that unless it were so."

Burnham recovered himself with an effort.

"Someone ought to get out there right away; I'm going to take my 'ship'. Listen in and catch everything you can; let me know if anything new comes up. When the governor calls, tell him I'll be out there in twenty minutes."

He dashed out of the building and along the connecting runway to the hangar. At his hasty approach the nearest mechanics dropped their work and quickly surrounded him.

"Something's happened to 3591!" he explained rapidly. "One of you get the boat crew ready at the dock. I want four more to go with me. We'll take 4700."

The men hurriedly obeyed his orders; within a minute the boat was ready. As they were about to shove off from the dock the radio operator ran toward them.

"The *Sherman* is going on," he announced breathlessly. "The governor told them to leave a commissioned officer; they dropped a naval officer bound for Manila."

Burnham nodded and dropped to his seat in the dory. In record time they passed through the narrow channel which led to the mooring buoy of Burnham's plane. A minute later the two powerful Liberties roared into life. Clearing the buoy with a skilful turn, Burnham thrust open both throttles and the huge flying boat thundered down Apra Bay; as the air speed meter passed fifty knots he hauled back on the control wheel and the heavy craft took the air with an eager, upward lunge.

With dizzy speed they whirled past Orote Point, the headland at the entrance to the bay. As the broad expanse of the Pacific unfolded before him, Burnham swung the plane to follow the bearing the *Sherman* had given. Off to the left he could see the smoke of the transport; evidently her commander was seeking to make up the time he had lost. As yet there was no sign of the deserted plane.

For several minutes they flashed at full speed toward their unseen goal, the hull of the flying boat barely skimming the waves as Burnham prepared for a quick landing. Then an irregular object stood out from the swells ahead: the man in the cockpit beside Burnham surveyed it through binoculars and nodded to the pilot.

As his own plane settled into the water Burnham looked searchingly at the abandoned craft. Strangely enough there was no sign of the officer who was to have been left. Burnham frowned: the *Sherman's* commander had disobeyed orders. He stooped down and closed the master switch, stopping both motors.

"I'm going to swim over," he explained to his crew chief. "It's only a short distance and we'll not drift apart."

Stripping off his outer clothing he dived into the water and with a few easy strokes reached the other flying boat. As he drew himself aboard he uttered a sharp exclamation.

In the bow cockpit lay two traveling bags, both marked "Lieut. R. F. Nelson, U. S. N."; in the pilot's seat lay a naval officer's cap, but nowhere in the plane was the owner. The captain of the *Sherman* had not disobeyed orders; like the crew of the plane, Lieutenant Nelson had disappeared!

Burnham, moving the traveling bags aside to disentangle a towline, trailed his fingers against something disagreeably moist and sticky. He stooped down and peered intently. The side of the hull was spattered with blood!

"It's the most incredible thing I've ever seen," declared Burnham that night, as he sat talking with Strathmore, superintendent of the Cable Station.

"It is very strange," admitted Strathmore. "If there had been some evidence of fire, that would explain it; they might be afraid of being blown up."

"But there wasn't any fire," pointed out Burnham. "The plane was all right; the motors started easily when we tried them. Besides, Larry Steele isn't the kind to jump out of his 'ship' at the first sign of trouble. He's not that kind."

"Neither is Lieutenant Nelson," said a quiet voice.

Both men turned in surprize; Vivian Strathmore, the superintendent's daughter, stood in the doorway. Her usually vivacious face was grave, her gay eyes troubled. Burnham rose to place a seat for her.

"I thought you had just met him," he replied. "He came ashore for a few hours this morning, didn't he?"

The girl nodded abstractedly.

"Yes, but I already knew him. We met in Honolulu last year. He is fully as courageous as Captain Steele; that is why I know it was nothing ordinary which took those men from the plane."

"I agree with that," said Burnham. "We've figured out that the plane couldn't have been down over fifteen minutes when the *Sherman* saw it. In that time Steele, Conroy and four mechanics disappeared. Yet the *Sherman* reported that there was not a boat in sight, and the nearest land was Guam, of course, twelve miles away. Then Nelson was left; I know it couldn't have been more than thirteen minutes when I got there—but he was gone! And then—the blood on the bow cockpit. It's maddening to sit here and realize our helplessness. If there were only something we could do—if we only had some idea—it would be different. But we're lost!"

Strathmore looked out over the reef-locked harbor.

"It is the first unusual happening here since 1917 when the German ship *Cormorant* was blown up by her commander to keep her out of the hands of the United States."

Burnham followed his glance toward the center of the bay.

"She was interned here, wasn't she?" he asked. "Where did she lie?"

"About where the transports moor now," replied the older man. "The morning we received word the United States had declared war, the governor sent an officer out to take over the vessel. Before he got there the ship was blown up. The crew, poor devils, had little warning."

The silence which fell was interrupted by the prolonged ringing of the telephone. Strathmore rose to answer it; in a few seconds he returned, greatly disturbed.

"The Guam-Honolulu cable has gone dead," he announced gravely. "I shall have to hurry over to the station."

Vivian rose quickly.

"We'll go with you, Father." She turned to Burnham. "It's a serious thing when the cables go wrong, you know. If a repair ship with drag lines isn't near there is nothing to do but wait, unless the governor sends out the station ship."

At the main station they were met by the chief operator, whose distress was extremely apparent.

"There was no sign of trouble when I came on duty," he explained in quick, nervous accents. "When the break came it was like an earthquake; the needle jumped two or three times and then left the tape. I've tested the local circuit but it's no use; the line is stone dead."

Strathmore hurriedly led the way into a side room where stood a peculiar instrument not unlike a stereopticon projector with a bank of resistance coils at its base.

"Find the break," he directed the chief operator. "Of all four cables, we could spare this one least."

Together the two men worked over the machine, while Burnham and the girl conversed in low tones at the side. Five minutes passed. Suddenly a clamor of voices arose in the main room outside; a moment later the door burst open and one of the junior operators plunged in, wild-eyed.

"The Manila line—it's gone, too!" he gasped out.

Strathmore's face paled.

"This is terrible," he groaned. "I shall be relieved of my post. What can it be? Is the island under an evil spell?"

Vivian hurried to his side.

"Don't worry, Father, it will be all right; whatever happens it isn't your fault."

The superintendent shook her off and turned almost in frenzy to his assistant at the break-determining instrument.

"Have you found it?" he demanded, as the chief operator straightened up from the machine. "Where is it, man? Don't stand there gaping!"

There was a strange look on the other man's face.

"I've found both breaks," he said tensely. "They're at exactly the same place—the center of Apra Bay!"

When Lieutenant Robert Nelson volunteered to leave the *Sherman*, on which he was a passenger, to board the deserted seaplane, he was actuated more by his own interests than a strict sense of duty. True, the mystery of the desertion attracted him, but there was a stronger reason for his offer. The opportunity to spend the month before the next transport with the attractive Vivian Strathmore was a bit of unlooked-for good fortune. He would have put to sea in a canoe under the same circumstances.

For this reason he watched the transport get under way with little concern. It would be but a few hours at most until he would be taken off by a boat from Guam. He had already inspected the plane and had found nothing to aid in solving the puzzle. There was nothing else to do but await the boat; he placed his cap on the seat beside him and was about to relax into a day dream when a curious swirling in the water hardly a hundred feet away caught his eye.

For an instant he stared in astonishment. Then as a dark cylindrical object reared upward through the trough of a wave he sat bolt upright, for he was looking upon the periscope of a submarine! As the lens of the periscope swung toward the plane, like the eye of some evil sea monster, he instinctively ducked out of sight into the hull.

His mind in a turmoil, he sought to fathom the meaning of this development. The disappearance of the plane crew became suddenly clear; the explanation of the affair was as dark as ever. This could be no American submarine, for there was none stationed at Guam and the nearest base was at the Philippines.

He found a small hole in the side of the hull and peeped out cautiously. The second periscope appeared; it was quickly followed by the dull, wet body of the unknown submarine. As Nelson watched, the conning tower hatch was opened and a burly figure was revealed. Cupping his hands, the man shouted toward Nelson's hiding place.

"Show yourself—you on the plane!"

The officer did not answer. The man in the conning tower drew an automatic and leveled it at the pilot's cockpit of the plane.

"I'll not fool with you," he snarled. "Stand up or I'll put a bullet through you."

Nelson complied reluctantly. The other man gestured with his pistol toward the water between the two crafts.

"Jump in and swim over here," he ordered curtly.

Nelson cast a hasty glance at the retreating transport; there was no hope of help from that quarter, for the submarine lay on the opposite side of the seaplane and was therefore hidden from anyone on the ship. The man in the conning tower raised his pistol again menacingly.

Nelson dived into the water and swam to the side of the submarine, where he crawled aboard. His captor had leaned down to shout an order to someone below; in a moment he reappeared. He proved to be a dissipated-looking man of middle age, with hard, steely eyes and a cruel mouth. He twisted the corner of this mouth into an evil grin as he leered down at Nelson.

"Another visitor, eh?" he said in a hoarse, grating voice. "Well, maybe I can use you."

The midway hatch opened and two villainous-appearing men in faded, dirty dungarees clambered out upon the runway.

"Take him below," ordered the man in the control tower. "Lock him up with those two——"

He stopped abruptly as a dull rumble was borne by the wind from the direction of the island. A seaplane had just rounded the headland at the channel entrance. The leader of the crew swore violently.

"Get inside!" he shouted, at the same time banging down the conning tower hatch cover. Nelson was roughly dragged to the midway hatch and all but thrown down the ladder. Hardly was this entrance secured when there came the whir of motors and the hiss of water rushing into the ballast tanks. Then the deck inclined steeply and the submarine nosed down at full speed.

In the semi-darkness below, Nelson was shoved into a tiny stateroom, the door closing behind him with a click of its lock. At his precipitous entrance two men leaped up from a narrow bunk. Nelson recognized Steele and Conroy, flyers he had met that morning.

"Nelson!" cried Steele in astonishment. "They got you, too! What has happened? Is there a fight on?"

Nelson shook his head regretfully.

"No one knows where you are—nor me, now. We spotted your plane from the *Sherman* and I offered to stay with it until a boat came. The transport has gone on. While I was sitting there this sub came up. That's all there was to it. What is it all about, anyway?"

Conroy had sunk back dispiritedly. Steele shrugged his shoulders gloomily.

"We don't know any more about it than you do. We were flying around waiting for the transport to come out when I happened to see this submarine lying just submerged. Of course it was easy to see from the air. Without thinking it over, I landed for a second look. They had their periscope up and saw us coming. Before we could make a move they covered us with two Lewis machine guns. I started to take off anyway, but they opened up and winged my crew chief in the shoulder, so I gave in. They'd have got all of us and there was no use sacrificing the whole outfit. We've been locked up ever since."

"What about the man who was hurt?" inquired Nelson.

"They had him bandaged up; I heard the one who calls himself 'Captain' say he would need him later. What he meant heaven only knows. The rest of my crew are locked up somewhere."

Nelson looked blank.

"Then you haven't any idea as to what's back of this?"

"Not the slightest," answered Steele, morosely. "If we had anything to go on it would be different. I don't think it's connected with any foreign power, though. The crew is of no particular nationality; just a gathering of scum from different navies, I'll wager. They look and act like pirates—but what on earth would pirates be doing out in this forsaken part of the world?"

Nelson stared thoughtfully at the plates which formed the outer skin of the undersea craft.

"I think it's an old German submarine," he said at last. "Also, the fellow who ordered me aboard looks like a German. Further than that I can't figure out anything. There's no doubt it's crooked, though, and it evidently has something to do with Guam, for if they had been just passing by they would not have cared if you did report their presence."

"Very clever!" broke in a sneering voice, and at the same moment the door of the stateroom opened and the sensuous face of the submarine commander appeared. For a few seconds he eyed the three prisoners with his sinister, twisted smile. Then he continued in his mocking voice.

"Now that we have slipped away from your friends above I'll explain away your little worries. I call myself Benter; it's as good a name as any other. I'm in command here and I'm not working for anyone but myself. What's more, every man on here works for me—or out he goes," he added with sudden menace. "You blundered into this deal. Now you can take your choice. Follow my orders and when I'm through here I'll put all seven of you ashore on some island where a ship goes by once or twice in a year. You'll be too late to stop me even when you do get off. But try to double-cross me just once—and I'll tie a weight to your neck and leave you on the bottom of the ocean!"

His hard eyes glared from one face to another.

"What do you want us to do?" asked Nelson coldly. "If it's anything against the United States you can go to the devil."

"I'll tell you," retorted Benter grimly. "Then you can choose for yourselves. I'm going after something in the strong room of the old *Cormorant;* she lies at the bottom of that harbor in there. I've got a plan of the ship and I've learned something about the wreck. Tonight when it's good and dark I'm going in and submerge just off from the old tub. Here's where you come in. It's going to be dangerous for the first men prying into the wreck and I need all my crew. Two of you will go first in special diving suits I've had made; if it's safe I'll send the rest of your men out."

"In other words," commented Steele dryly, "if we come out of the wreck alive and bring you whatever you're after, we can have the chance of starving to death on a desert island?"

Benter's eyes glittered angrily at the flyer's insolence.

"Yes, damn you!" he flared out. "And if you don't watch out you'll not have that chance. I don't have to keep you—I'm just going to use you now you've butted into my game."

Nelson sent a swift cautioning glance at Steele. Conroy appeared eager to accept Benter's offer.

"I think we'll take you up on it," said Nelson quickly. "It's the only way out for us."

Benter seemed somewhat mollified.

"I thought you'd see it," he observed, twisting his lips into a complacent grin. "I'll tell your men; they'll do what you say, I guess. We'll go in at 8 o'clock; you'll need something to brace you up for the night's work, so I'll have some chow sent in."

As the door closed behind him Nelson beckoned the other two men together for a whispered conference.

"I don't trust him at all but there is no use antagonizing him. A lot of things may happen between now and midnight. One thing, the diving suits he mentioned must be unit suits, complete in themselves and having separate oxygen tanks. The old style ones would be too clumsy for working around in the wreck. I don't see why we can't escape by walking toward shore until we reach shallow water."

Steele's face grew sober.

"There isn't a chance of that, Nelson. You don't realize the nature of that harbor. It is surrounded by a coral reef, which shelves off steeply from a depth of ten feet to one of a hundred and fifty in less than fifteen yards; that coral is the most jagged substance I have ever seen. Climbing out of there would be like ascending a steep cliff; it would be impossible with a heavy diving suit and weights to carry with you. Not only that but we are going into the worst part of the whole harbor. The *Cormorant* lies at the bottom of this coral cliff in the very deepest water; I've tried several times to see the wreck from the air and have failed every time."

"Well, then," said Nelson resolutely, "we'll have to watch for a chance to overcome Benter and his crew. I have had submarine duty; in a pinch I could get this boat to the surface."

No such chance came, however. When their food arrived two of the crew stood at the door with automatics; no other opportunity came until the submarine had passed unseen under the eyes of the outpost at Orote Point and was submerging in the center of the harbor. Under the direction of a block-browed ruffian named Shrenn, of whom even the motley crew seemed to stand in awe, the three officers were taken from their tiny prison and were led under guard to the forward airlocks.

Without a word Shrenn indicated three diving suits into which the prisoners were forced to climb. Each suit was equipped with a separate oxygen tank, an air control knob and a switch controlling the light in the helmet.

Shrenn indicated Nelson with a hairy fist.

"You'll go first; Benter's going to follow you with two lights from the conning tower. He says you know what you're after; here's the layout of the old hulk—the way she used to look."

He spread a worn blueprint before Nelson's eyes. The officer followed it mechanically; though of a courageous nature he realized the risk of entering the sunken ship was not small. In addition to this his mind was busy with plans for escape.

The whir of the motors, which had been grinding steadily, ceased abruptly; the submarine crept ahead cautiously. Then came a scraping along the keel and the next instant the craft came to a complete stop.

"We're on the bottom," announced Shrenn quickly. "All ready—you! Take a pike and an ax with you and get into the lock. Be back here inside of twenty minutes."

Nelson hesitated before securing the helmet on to his suit.

"Is that all the tanks are good for?" he queried dubiously.

Shrenn grinned sourly.

"Hell, no! They're good for nine or ten hours, but Benter says for you to be back here then and you'd better do it if you want to save your skin."

A MINUTE later Nelson stood in the airlock, his heart beating rapidly at the realization of what lay before him. Slowly the lock filled with water as Shrenn equalized the pressure with that of the sea outside. Then the outer door slid back. Nelson hesitated, his fingers fumbling for the light switch; the gloom beyond

was of the grave. As he pressed the button a sudden radiance penetrated the blackness and he quickly stepped forward into the water outside the submarine.

The sand crunched away from under his heavy leaded boots. Despite his danger a certain thrill shot over him. . . . he was standing at the bottom of the mighty Pacific Ocean! As he peered about him a brilliant ray of light from the conning tower illuminated the water ahead; a second later another ray joined the first.

Nelson walked forward slowly, feeling his way with the pike. A strange fish, unlike anything he had seen, darted at the light in his helmet. He struck at it with his pike, finding it difficult to move his arms because of the resistance of the water. The thing fled, emitting a grayish liquid which temporarily obstructed Nelson's vision. He proceeded steadily, following the rays of light which stretched ahead of him. On all sides he saw strange creatures of the deep, some fleeing at his approach, others being driven off with difficulty. Suddenly there loomed up before him a shadowy mass; as the rays of light from the submarine shifted he recognized with a chill of aversion the sunken *Cormorant!*

It lay wedged between two great jutting crags, its plates torn asunder and a gaping hole amidships showing where the explosion had occurred which sent it to the bottom. Beyond it, grimly forbidding, rose a steep wall of coral rock, a fitting background to this horrible ship of the dead. As Nelson paused, one of the spotlights shifted away from him. He looked back; another figure was struggling toward him. When the second man came up he found it was Steele.

Together they entered the gloomy interior. Here they were aided only by the lights in their helmets, which penetrated only a few yards. Working carefully, the two men had advanced through a maze of tangled beams and battered plates when they came to that part of the ship which had suffered most from the explosion. The whole port side had been blown outward for many yards; above them the decks opened to the sea. Nelson had started ahead in search of the strong room when a sudden movement at one side caused him to turn quickly. Steele was jabbing desperately at something which had come from the darkness above; as Nelson turned his helmet light upward he saw with a thrill of horror the hideous arm of a giant cuttlefish encircle his comrade's neck and jerk him from his feet.

Seizing the ax from his belt, Nelson brought it down with all his might upon the tightening tentacles. The arm released Steele suddenly, while it writhed angrily to and fro. Steele, half suffocated, clutched a near-by girder for support. Nelson looked fearfully upward toward where the arm had withdrawn. Two horrible eyes, filled with incredible malignancy, were reflected in the flickering rays of his helmet light. He shuddered and hurriedly switched off the light, motioning Steele to do the same; in the darkness the creature would find it difficult to search them out. As the lights vanished, an abysmal blackness sprang into existence. Suddenly Nelson felt Steele clutch his arm; he turned and stood rooted to the spot in breath-taking terror. Caught in a rotting rope swayed the skeleton of a man, its bleached bones glowing with devilish luminosity, while the skull gave forth a ghastly grin that seemed to mock them and their helplessness.

Filled with a mad desire to escape from this tomb of death and horror, both men turned and fled toward the opening through which they had come. In the darkness they collided again and again until at last they were forced to turn on their guiding

lights. The cuttlefish, if it still remained above, gave no sign of its presence.

Outside of the wreck both men looked at each other despairingly; to return to the submarine without the information for which they had been sent would be to incur Benter's wrath and probably an early death—and a horrible one.

While they hesitated there came a sudden exodus of men in diving suits from both airlocks of the submarine. Nelson strode toward them, followed by Steele. If it proved to be the rest of the plane crew with Conroy he meant to warn them of the danger existing in the wreck. With this thought in mind he approached the first man in the group and peered in through the glass front of the helmet. To his astonishment Benter's eyes glared back at him. The procession which followed was made up of the plane crew, Conroy, and three of the submarine crew. Evidently Benter had grown tired of waiting and had decided to engineer the matter himself.

The submarine commander motioned with his pike toward the wreck; Steele and Nelson endeavored by signals to explain what they had found, but Benter grew impatient and imperiously indicated an advance.

At that moment the light rays from the conning tower grew suddenly dim. Nelson followed Benter's startled glance upward just in time. The cuttlefish, darting from its hiding place above the *Cormorant*, was descending swiftly upon the intruders in its domain; its long arms, writhing greedily toward its intended victims, extended and receded with incredible rapidity.

Eluding an outstretched tentacle by a narrow margin, Nelson commenced a hurried retreat toward the submarine, followed by the rest of the plane crew, who had gathered about Steele and Conroy. Benter, with his three helpers, fought desperately to extricate themselves from the merciless arms which drew them irresistibly toward that awful, black center, from which bulged the fiendish eyes of the monster. Once an ax bit deeply into a tightening arm; the next instant an opaque substance shot out from the body of the cuttlefish, rendering both it and its struggling victims invisible.

As Nelson and the plane crew watched in fascination the black area moved toward them; Benter and his men were fighting back toward the submarine. To escape being drawn again into the turmoil the seven who had been prisoners skirted the submarine and assumed a safer viewpoint. There was no advantage in going to Benter's aid; even if the attempt were successful it would only return them to his power.

Steele, stepping backward incautiously, suddenly tripped and fell prostrate. As he rose with the help of two of the others he noticed a strange object below him, like a flexible pipe, which stretched off into the darkness on both sides. Signaling Nelson, he bent over to examine it. Nelson, kneeling down quickly, chipped once or twice at the surface of the thing which Steele had found. Then as his mind hit upon the truth he clutched the other frantically. Beneath their feet lay one of the trans-Pacific cables, over which hundreds of messages were even at that moment passing from continent to continent, relayed through the station at Guam. The thought was maddening; here was help so near and yet as unattainable as the stars.

But was it? A bit of conversation returned to Nelson's mind, teeming with sudden importance. To Steele's amazement he bent over and frenziedly attacked the cable with his ax. In another moment its severed ends lay before him. Then he turned and headed away into the darkness, trail-

ing his pike along the ocean bed. There were three more cables, he knew. If they were to be saved those cables must be found.

Back of him there came a blinding darkness as the cuttlefish settled upon the conning tower of the submarine. Stretched motionless to one side lay the mangled form of the thing which had been Benter; a short distance from him one of his crew crawled in agony toward the airlock. The other two had vanished. There came a roaring vibration as one of the powerful arms wrenched a periscope free from its sockets—then one by one huge air bubbles began to rise swiftly toward the unseen surface above.

On the morning following the disappearance of the six flyers and the officer from the *Sherman*, Captain Burnham rose early and made a hasty journey into Agana, the capital of the island. Then he returned at top speed to the Cable Station.

"I have good news for you," he told Strathmore. "The governor has given you permission to use the *Barnes* for dragging the harbor. I told him the two most important cables had broken in some mysterious manner, right here in the bay."

Strathmore's face, which had been extremely haggard, cleared slightly.

"Thank God for that," he replied gratefully. "It is even worse now than it was when you left. A few minutes after you were gone the two others went in the same way."

Burnham stared at him incredulously.

"All four?" he exclaimed. "Not at the same place?"

"Yes," Strathmore lowered his voice. "It's uncanny—the strangest thing we've ever had happen to us. I'm having a job of it to keep my Chamorran operators working. They believe this is all caused by some supernatural agency."

Fifteen minutes later the station ship *Barnes*, which had been equipped hurriedly with dragging apparatus, left her anchorage and proceeded to the mouth of the harbor. Here the drags were lowered while the ship cruised diagonally across the paths of the broken cables, the bay being too short for the ship to work at right angles.

As the ship passed the center of the harbor there was a sudden commotion at the stern. Strathmore and Burnham hurried aft at once, followed by Vivian, who had insisted on being a spectator.

"We've caught something, sir," reported the man in charge of the winding drum. "The drag pulled across something and nearly yanked the drum loose. Shall we haul—Good Lord! What's that?"

A great bubble of air, rolling up from below, burst with a splash alongside the ship. The men at the rail recoiled fearfully. The drag line slackened, then went taut once more.

"Haul in!" cried Strathmore, hastily. "You must have fouled something in the *Cormorant*. I'd forgotten where it lay for a moment."

The winding drum reeled in rapidly, groaning at the burden put upon it. As the drag broke the surface of the water the assembled watchers fell back, paralyzed with amazement. Clinging desperately to the drag, like some monster torn from its home in the deep, was a man clad in the unwieldy garments of a diver, the globular helmet completing the likeness to some creature from another world.

"God!" breathed Burnham, his eyes bulging. "Strathmore . . . . do you see it? . . . . what does it mean? . . . ."

As the sudden tension broke, a dozen men rushed forward and lifted the weird figure aboard the ship. In a few seconds the cumbrous helmet

was removed. A pale, distorted face glared out.

"Conroy!" screamed Burnham, his face ashen. Several of the Chamorran seamen fell to their knees and crossed themselves in fear. "Conroy—in heaven's name!—what has happened? Where——"

The exhausted man raised himself with an effort.

"The drag—send it down again. Six more—maybe dead—hurry .... *hurry!*"

Then he collapsed upon the deck.

Six times the drag hurtled to the depths below and returned, bearing its astonishing burden of human life. As the last helmet was lifted Nelson's drawn face was visible.

"Just in time," he said feebly. "Tank almost gone .... outside more than ten hours."

Burnham leaned over to catch the whispered words.

"Outside of what, Nelson?" he questioned gently.

The other man smiled wearily.

"Submarine .... all dead inside .... devilfish ...."

As he slipped into unconsciousness he carried with him the vision of Vivian Strathmore's dark eyes, blurred with tears. . . .

"If I hadn't seen you coming up out of the sea, I wouldn't believe the story," said Burnham. "It's the most fantastic thing I've ever heard."

Nelson, recovered from his experience after four days' careful nursing by Vivian Strathmore, smiled amusedly.

"It's almost hard for me to believe," he answered. "It's like a horrible nightmare. I want to forget it, now that the cables are repaired and everything is explained."

He turned and gazed out over the waving coconut palms at Apra Bay; slowly the bay faded from view and before his eyes came a vision, terrible as it was fleeting, in which a giant cuttlefish hovered over a disabled submarine like some malign member of the Forces of Evil. As he turned back the vision vanished under the happy light in Vivian Strathmore's eyes.

Adam, to Lilith

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

And now, in these my uneventful days
When life assumes a dreary, sallow glaze,
And pallid virtue's leprous hue
Sickens and wearies me, I think of you
Who lured me to your silken lupanar,
Perfumed with musk and purple nenuphar,
An afreet's cavern on an eastern isle,
A darkness lumined by your hyacinthine smile. . . .
Lilith, the twining midnight of your hair
Across my wandering path has laid a snare,
A coiling maze of subtle witchery
That binds and traps me irresistibly.

THE AVENGER

A Play in One Act

By H. THOMPSON RICH

Author of "The Sev'n-Ring'd Cup," "The Purple Cincture," etc.

PERSONS

A Captain

A Nun

TIME: Night.

PLACE: War Area.

SCENE: A small stone chamber high in the tower of a shell-torn convent behind the lines. To the right, about eight feet from the floor, is a great gap, rent in the masonry during the recent bombardment. To the rear is a small barred window. To the left is a heavy, iron-bound door, leading to a flight of stairs that go down. In the center of the room is a rough oak table, and on it a candelabrum holding two tall white candles. They are lit and cast a frail, shadowy light into the corners of the room.

Beside the table, on the edge of a half-broken chair, sits the Nun. She is dressed in the gray garb of her order and seems scarcely more than a child, pale and delicate and beautiful. She sits tense, in an attitude of horror and dread.

Now there comes the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs. The Nun looks up with anguish in her face, then bows her head and her lips move. She crosses herself—just as the door opens to admit the Captain. He is dressed in field uniform, dirty and mussed. On his face is a reddish stubble.

CAPTAIN: (lurching toward her) Well, my little one! I have come back, you see. Always keep my promises. *(He pauses, as though expecting her to speak.)* Not very glad to see me, eh? *(No answer.)* Oh, well, you'll get over that. Come, see what I've brought my little pet. *(He takes a large bottle from under his coat and places it on the table with a bang.)* Some of your celebrated wine! The Mayor gave it to us. Fine boy, the Mayor—but far too talkative! Had to make an example of him. *(She looks up, aghast.)* Guess he's among your angels now—or down below. Ha-ha! Yes, most likely down below! *(He lifts the bottle to his lips and takes a long drink.)* Too bad! His wine is good. Here, my pretty one. Have a drink.

NUN: (turning away) No.

CAPTAIN: (coming toward her, brandishing the bottle) But yes, I say!

NUN: No.

CAPTAIN: By Christ, you will! *(He seizes her roughly and forces the bottle to her lips.)* Drink!

NUN: May the mercy of Heaven protect me!

(At that moment one of the two candles flickers violently, as if blown by a strong wind. Startled, the Captain lets her go and wheels around with his hand on his holster, half expecting to see someone. But no one is visible.)

CAPTAIN: (facing her again) A curse on my nerves! I am getting the jumps over nothing. Either this wine is overstrong or the night is overdark. But bah! Do I fear? And for what?

Enough! *(He lifts the bottle and drinks long. Then he turns to her.)* Here, drink! It will do you good. You look pale as death.

NUN: (solemnly) I pray only to die.

CAPTAIN: And what is there in death half so precious as that which life offers? Here, my little one. Drink! *(Again he forces the bottle to her lips.)* It will warm that cold blood of yours!

NUN: Gentle Jesus, protect me! O God the Father, deliver my spirit and save this man from sin!

CAPTAIN: Ha! You pray for me? Well, save your prayers! I'll have no salvation from your watery saints. There are stern gods in our land. *(He encircles her with his arm.)* I command you, drink!

(Again one of the two candles flickers violently, as if it would expire. As before, the Captain lets her go and wheels swiftly around, searching the gloom with fevered eyes. But no one is visible.)

CAPTAIN: (turning once more to her) May a blight fall on your infernal tower! *(He glances nervously over his shoulder.)* I'll not be bettered by a draft of air! *(He raises the bottle to his lips.)* If you won't drink, my pet, I'll drink for you. *(He drains the bottle and hurls it against the far side of the stone wall, where it bursts into fragments, sending weird echoes reverberating down the empty corridors below.)* Now you've lost your chance at the Mayor's wine. And curse it, I've no more for myself. *(He is becoming momentarily more intoxicated.)* But there's other wine tonight, my pretty one! *(He leers at her.)* The wine of those chaste red lips! *(pausing)* At least, I hope they're chaste. *(Now he pushes his bloated face close to hers.)*

NUN: (cringing from him in horror) O God, may the Angel of Death visit me at this moment!

CAPTAIN: (laughing deliriously) Ha-ha! You call upon your holy birds to save you. Well, I defy your Angel—and your God! Ha-ha-ha! *(The tower rings with his drunken laughter. Sweeping her into his arms, he presses his sodden lips to hers, half suffocating her with his foul breath.)* Now where is your Angel? Where is your God?

NUN: (limp in his arms, her lips moving slowly) O God! . . . . Father in Heaven . . . . I, Thy child, come again to Thee. . . .

CAPTAIN: (angrily) Cease that maudlin muttering! It is wasted! Your God is a long way off! He does not hear! *(pausing)* There is no one to hear, anyway—only the wind and the night. Ha-ha! Only the wind and the night! *(He crushes her to him again, bruising her now silent lips with his cruel mouth.)* Tonight you are mine, my pet! When I have done with you, then you can go to your God! But I have you now, my pale lily! And who is stronger, I or your God?

NUN: (weakly, smiling) God—God is stronger. I do not fear. I am in His presence. He is near me. He is around me. His Angel. . . . His Angel is coming . . . . coming! . . . .

CAPTAIN: (releasing her suddenly) What talk is this? I am not afraid of you! *(Yet he shakes with fear.)* Tonight you are mine! Tomorrow——

(For the third time one of the two candles flickers violently—and then more violently, as a rush of wind goes through the shattered tower, carrying a faint undertone of music. With a sharp cry the Captain wheels around, his eyes suddenly bright with terror.)

NUN: (swaying) O God! . . . . here . . . . Thy presence! . . . . *(She sinks to the floor.)* Thy Angel! . . . .

(The rush of wind rises to an ominous pitch, its undertone of music swelling to an unearthly cadence. Rigid with dread, the Captain stands with his eyes riveted on the candle, which gives one last violent flicker, and expires. Instantly the wind dies away, the weird music broken off abruptly in a jangling discord. All is now silent in the damp room and there is no sound save the distant roar of bombardment. It is darker now, the remaining candle failing to light up its dim corners.)

CAPTAIN: (standing erect, his face distorted) Get up, girl. Get up! I'll not harm you. *(When she makes no move he bends down—to draw back shaking.)* Dead!

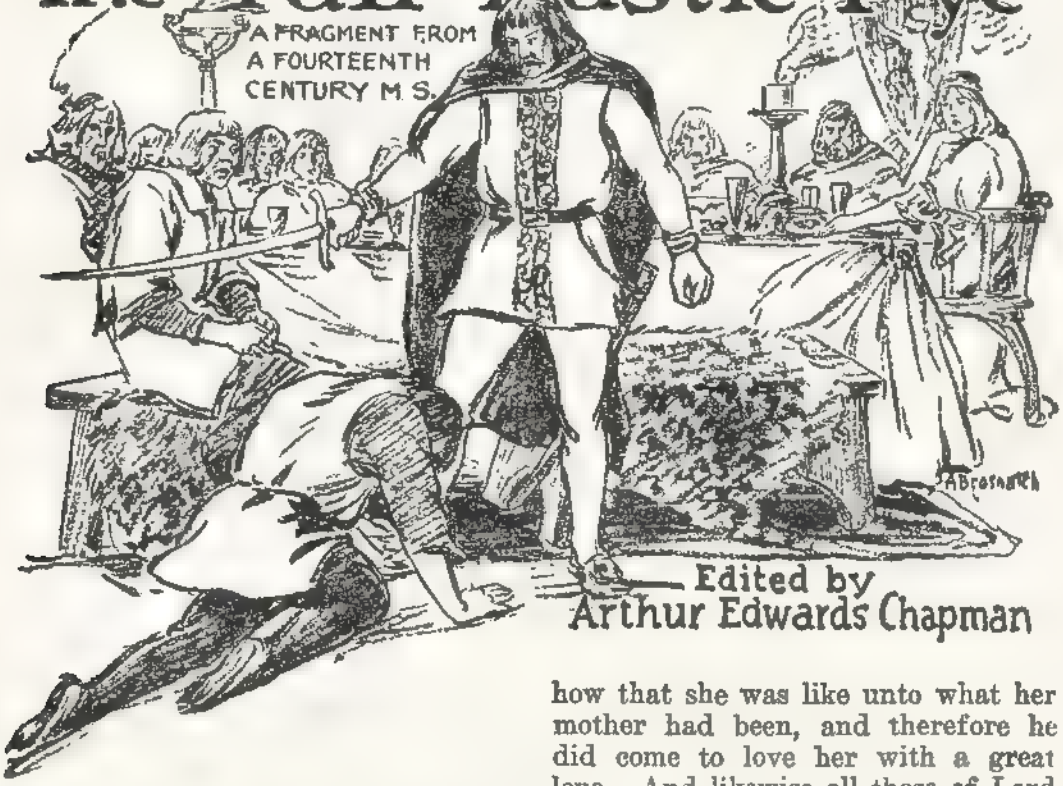
(Backing step by step, he retreats toward the door. Grasping the latch, he is about to open it and plunge from the room, when once more there comes that far-off rush of wind and now the remaining candle begins to flicker. He stands with his hand on the latch, fascinated with terror, unable to move. The murmuring sound draws nearer and nearer, coming as though from immeasurable distances, and the candle flickers more and more violently. Now he struggles to open the door but his hands are nerveless and can not swing its mass of weight. Trapped by his fear, he stands there at bay, his eyes fixed on the flickering candle. But now his attention is suddenly directed to the right wall of the room, where the masonry has been torn away. Through a jagged rent a patch of sky is visible and the light of a single star shines in. But the Captain's eyes do not see the star. They seem to see something else, something nearer yet farther, something that fills him with unbearable dread. By this time the wind his risen again to an ominous pitch, relieved by no undertone of that strange music that swept through the room before. Now the candle flickers with such violence that it seems momentarily on the point of expiring. With a sudden motion, he draws his pistol.)

CAPTAIN: (backing from the door into the far corner at the left, where he is swallowed up in shadows.) Whatever you are, I defy you! *(He laughs dreadfully.)* Ha-ha! Whatever you are, I challenge you! Stand out, you coward, and fight! If you are Death, I have met you many times face to face! Why should I fear you now? I am an officer of the army and I fear nothing! Stand out! Ha-ha! Stand out!

Moving furtively, pistol leveled, the Captain emerges for a moment from the shadows, sweeping the room with his haggard face, eyes blank, staring. Suddenly he pauses and a shiver runs through him. Lifting his pistol to the far wall, he attempts to fire—but his nerveless finger will not move the trigger. With a cry of despair, he lifts has hand to his face and backs again into the shadows, his braggadocio supplanted by shaking cowardice. There is a sob—then an ugly flash spits through the gloom, followed almost immediately by the bark of his pistol. For a moment, as the reverberations volley through the room, the Captain is seen dimly, swaying. Then he crumples to the floor and lies still. The moaning wind terminates in a low wail and fades off into immeasurable distances. The remaining candle gives one last violent flicker—and expires. On a room now in total darkness, save for the faint light of a single star that shines in through the rent in the masonry, descends

THE CURTAIN

The Fair Pastie Pye



Edited by
Arthur Edwards Chapman

I. IN THIS year the good Lady Elfreda died, giving birth to a fair daughter. And the Lord Redwald was sore grieved thereat, and his heart was heavy, for he had loved his lady dearly. Wherefore he retired unto himself for many days, speaking little and mourning his loss, and would not look upon the face of the babe.

II. Now after a time Lord Redwald's bitterness began to pass from him, and although he did not forget his dear lady, the pain that had been in his heart was assuaged somewhat. And the hounds saw him once more, for he had always been over fond of the chase. And those that lived about him rejoiced to see the shadow depart from his brow. Thus sped the years by and the babe grew into a sweet child and fair to behold. And the Lord Redwald saw how that she was like unto what her mother had been, and therefore he did come to love her with a great love. And likewise all those of Lord Redwald's household did worship her and wait upon her smile.

III. 'T WAS about this time that the Lord Redwald became troubled about the affairs of his household, the which were not conducted as smoothly as they had been wont when the good lady lived. Wherefore he became of the mind to take unto himself another mate into whose hands he might entrust the keys. Now there lived in a neighboring manor a young widow woman, yclept Matilda, whose husband, a brave knight, had fallen in the wars in Normandy. This lady did the lord Redwald presently wed, making her the mistress of his household; and the two estates became as one, being vastly rich and wide. So was Lord Redwald's mind released from this trouble and he found himself free to order his days as a good knight

should. Many were the knightly arts that were practised about the castle, and more than one joyous passage of arms was held, to which came noble knights from out all the land. The castle was ever open to any stranger whether noble or commoner, and the fame of Lord Redwald spread abroad by reason of his liberality and the richness of his board. Yet above all did Lord Redwald love to follow the hounds on the chase, the which he would do as frequently as he might, being ofttimes absent from the castle for many days. Nay, not above all was his love of the chase, for there was one thing that he loved more. And this was to sit and watch the child, the fair Eleanor, at her play. To listen to her innocent prattle and to look upon her pretty ways pleased him mightily, and the child was very dear to him.

IV. On this fashion did the years pass and the child, Eleanor, grew to a comely maid. And her years were six and ten. Of a wondrous beauty was she, her skin white as the whitest doe of the forest, and her cheeks had borrowed the fair blush of the rose. Likewise was her hair yellow as the ripe corn, and her eyes as the summer sky. And the Lord Redwald loved her more and more. And the Lady Matilda beheld this and how that her husband spent many hours in the maid's company. Wherefore her heart rebelled with jealousy so that she grew to hate the maid. But the fair Eleanor knew naught of this and was ever gentle and dutiful toward her stepmother, and would seek to aid her in her tasks about the castle. Now in this did the Lady Matilda espy a chance to give vent to her spite upon the gentle child. Wherefore she did approach her lord and say thus: My lord and husband, didst thou make me mistress of thy household and entrust me with the keys? And he answered, This in soeth I did, as thou knowest. Why, therefore, dost come to me and question thus? And she said, the maid Eleanor being there by Lord Redwald's side: This milk-white chit doth put herself forward before me and make interference with the kitchen knaves and the chamber wenches, bidding them to do this and that which is my right. Then the Lord Redwald turned to the maid and said . . . . [*the writing here is faint and illegible*] . . . . put thyself forward before thy lady mother. Is this true, child? And the maid said, Nay, sweet my lord and father, I have ever been obedient to my lady mother's behests, and have not sought to take her authority from her. I have but desired to learn the household tasks and the ordering thereof as is a maid's duty. Then the Lady Matilda was angered and said, She is a forward and lying wench and should be whipt! I pray thee, lord husband, that thou wilt keep the chit from taking my authority from me, and punish her for her forwardness. Then Lord Redwald looked upon the maid's fair face again and said, Is this true, child, that thy lady mother hath said? And the maid answered as formerly that she had but wisht to help the Lady Matilda in her tasks and to learn the ordering of the knight's household. Whereat the Lord Redwald spake his good wife softly and said, Meseemeth that thou hast misjudged the child, good wife. I charge thee that thou shouldst be kindly with her and instruct her well as she desires, for she is my own child and vastly dear to me. Thus saying he took the maid to him and kist her lips, for his love was very great as he had said. But the Lady Matilda grew dark of brow and swept in anger from the hall, answering not. And her heart burned with wrath against the child, and her hatred increased apace.

V. Now there served in the kitchens of Lord Redwald's castle a scullion-boy hight Robin, a faithful wight, yet humble of birth. Oftimes had this boy seen the Lady Eleanor as she moved about the kitchens to instruct the master-cook in what he should prepare for the tables, and his heart was smitten sorely by her fair beauty and he loved her. Yet did poor Robin well realize how hopeless was his passion, for she was a lady of high station and he but a rough scullion-knave. Wherefore he did worship her at a long distance and endure the achings of his heart in silence. And when he was able to escape the watchful eye of the master-cook he would steal away from the kitchens, and hiding himself some way off would watch the maid as she played about the castle with her ladies or workt diligently at her tapestry-frame by the window of her chamber. Likewise when he helpt to carry the meats into the great hall and saw her sitting there in all her beauty by Lord Redwald's side, he would be constrained to neglect his duties by reason of his hopeless love. And this coming to the ears of the master-cook would cause him to abuse the boy roundly and clout him hardly for a dreamy losel. But Robin complained not because that the vision of his dear mistress that was enshrined within his heart served him as a shield and hauberk to turn aside these feeble shafts.

VI. Upon a certain day the Lord Redwald gathered unto him in the courtyard of the castle a goodly company of gentlemen, likewise many stout knaves and a large pack of brave, eager hounds. For he was minded to hunt the deer that abounded in the forest about the castle, and had sworn that this hunt should be the greatest and most magnificent that had ever taken place, lasting seven full days. Now this goodly party moved out from the courtyard with a great clatter of harness, gay laughter from the noble knights, shouts of the varlets and eager baying of hounds. And as they went forth the Lord Redwald took hold of the maid Eleanor, who was there to bid him farewell, and lifted her lightly before him. And thus he rode, stroking her yellow hair and kissing her lips fondly, until he came to the castle gate where he set her down again, declaring how great was his love for her. But the Lady Matilda was not there to bid her lord farewell. She stood high upon the battlements of the castle and from there watcht the gay body ride out. And as she beheld how that Redwald made much of his child, nor yet questioned where his lady wife might be, her heart hardened against the maid. She told herself that the maid had stolen her husband's love, and therefore her brow grew dark and evil thoughts were in her mind.

VII. Now upon the morning of the seventh day when the Lord Redwald and his party should return from the hunt, the Lady Matilda did call the maid Eleanor unto her. And she said, This night doth the lord thy father return from the hunt. Therefore is it meet that we should prepare a goodly feast for him. Go thou, child, to the master-cook and bid him that he shall kill the milk-white doe. And the maid did as she was bid. Then the Lady Matilda watched her going, and her eyes were harder than granite and the smile that curled her lips more cruel than the sharpest arrow.

VIII. The scullion-boy, yclept Robin, was about his duties in the kitchen when the maid Eleanor came thither. And his heart leapt joyously at the sight of her. And he held his hand and gazed upon her. And it appeared to him that

she had never looked more wondrous fair. Yet did her beauty seem out of place there amidst the heat of the ovens and the reek of meats, and the boy feared lest it should wither. But the maid heeded him not, for she wot not how he worshipt her. And as she past by him her gown brusht the back of his hand so that a right marvelous thrill coursed through him. And he furtively prest his hand against his lips, the while his eyes followed her every movement. But the maid heeded him not. Then said she to the master-cook, a great fellow and ill-favored: My lady mother doth bid me to command thee that thou shouldst kill the milk-white doe. For the Lord Redwald doth return this even from the hunt. Then the master-cook did look upon her fair young beauty, and evil was the face of him and cruel the gleam in his eyes. But he said no word at once and took up from the table beside him a great knife and felt its edge with care. And the knife was very sharp. Then the master-cook did smile a wicked smile and on the sudden gript the maid by her fair white wrist. And he thrust forward his face into hers and he said: The lady commands me to kill the milk-white doe. And he laughed so cruelly that the maid's rose-cheeks became all white, and she tried to withdraw herself from him. But he held her fast and said: Thou art the milk-white doe. 'Tis thee that I must kill as thy mother hath commanded! Then did the master-cook raise the keen-edged blade as though he would sheathe it in the maid's breast. And the maid stood there all limp and trembling and could not stir, nor could she say aught for the horror that was upon her. Then did the scullion-boy approach and beseech the master-cook to stay his hand, saying: Slay her not, good master-cook, oh, slay her not, for Christ His sake! But the master-cook bade him hold his tongue, saying, The lady hath commanded me and her I will obey. And he raised the knife a second time. But the scullion-boy took him by the hand and clung thereto all tightly. And he cried with a loud voice, Oh, spare her, good master-cook, spare my fair mistress, I pray thee! Let me die in her stead so that she go free and hide herself till my Lord Redwald returns! Then canst thou show my dead body to the lady and say: I have killed the milk-white doe as thou didst bid me. But slay not my sweet mistress! But the master-cook flung him roughly aside and threatened him with the knife, saying, Hold thy peace, knave, and meddle not with that which does not concern thee lest I am minded to slay not one milk-white doe but two! And of such a great fierceness was his mien, and so terrible the manner in which he brandisht his keen knife that the boy was smitten with a great fear. Wherefore he turned and fled thence, all trembling, and went and hid himself away in a dark corner. And because of the . . . . [*Here the parchment is faded and cracked so that the words can not be deciphered.*]

IX. . . . . sorrow at her fate. And his fear having left him somewhat the boy did venture to creep back to the kitchen. Here, finding the door to be slightly ajar, he lookt within. And great indeed was his horror at what he saw, so that the hair of his head stood up on end. And his flesh chilled and the blood curdled within his veins. The eyes with which he looked upon this dread scene were like to burst from their sockets. He tried to give voice to his terror, but his throat was parcht and the sounds came not. Then did he fling up his hands before his face to shut out the horror, and all shaking as one who has the plague he turned and fled away for the second time.

X. Now with the coming of the even of that day the Lord Redwald and his gay following got them back from the chase. And much merriment and jesting was there amongst them all, for the kill had been a right noble one, and everyone was in high spirits. Within the great hall had been prepared a rich repast by the Lady Matilda against their coming. And so they went in and sate themselves down. And upon the table that was set for the Lord Redwald was placed a great pye of such nobleness and size as surely had ne'er been seen before. A right magnificent pye indeed was this such as might have contained with ease a whole sheep, and the crust of it was all richly brown from the oven. And at the sight thereof the eyes of those that beheld it nigh started from their sockets, and many tongues licked impatient lips in anticipation. Then the Lord Redwald came forward towards his place at the table. But as he lookt upon the chair that had been placed for the maid Eleanor and saw that it was empty, the smiles faded from his face. And he gazed anxiously about that hall in search of her whom he loved so well. But he saw her not. And he said to the Lady Matilda, his good wife, Where is my sweet babe that she be not here to greet me? And the lady said, Alas, good my lord and husband, she is a wayward child and hath gone into some nunnery. And he said, What is this? My sweet one hath left me and said no word? Then the Lady Matilda beguiled him with a soft voice, saying, The chit was ever ungrateful and merits not thy regard. Therefore sit thee down, my beloved husband, and eat of this fair pastie pye that I have prepared for thee. And so she sought to tempt him and draw his thoughts away from his child. But the Lord Redwald would not be comforted, and his sorrow was very great. And he stood up before that noble company and laid his hand on his sword hilt and swore a great oath. And he said, My sweet babe hath left me, whom I loved more dearly than anything, even life itself. And my heart is sorely rent. And I swear by all the saints in heaven, by this holy cross of my sword and by my knightly oath that I will not eat nor drink until I see her face once more!

XI. Now upon the swearing of this great oath a silence fell upon the company. And the Lady Matilda looked upon her lord in anger, and her eyes gleamed with a great hatred as she harkened to his words. Then sprang forward the scullion-boy who had stood there with the other serving knaves at the carving-board that was by the side of the hall. And he stopt before his lord and fell upon his knees. Then lifted he up his voice right shrilly so that all could hear. And he said: Oh, my lord and master, how shall I tell thee! Alas, alas, if thou wouldst see thy fair daughter once more, cut up that pye before thee! For therein wilt find her flesh all minced up small! Then did the Lord Redwald blanch with horror at the boy's words. And he said in a low voice. Now heaven silence thy lying tongue, thou vile knave. What dost thou say? But the boy started to his feet and accused the Lady Matilda. And there was truth in his tone. And he said, Alas, alas, my sweet mistress is no more! 'Twas her wicked stepmother who ordered the cruel deed. Good master, hear me. I did beseech the master-cook to spare her and take my flesh instead. May he be for ever curst! He would not heed me. For the lady had commanded, he said, and he must obey. Then did the Lord Redwald become as one possest of a devil. And the wicked stepmother shrank from him and protested her innocence; but guilt was in her face.

And Lord Redwald ordered that the master-cook should be brought before him. And he threatened him with all manner of grim penalties. Whereat the cruel monster did fall upon his knees and make confession, saying that the Lady Matilda had compelled him. Terrible was Lord Redwald's rage at this and awesome to behold. And he drew forth his sword and raised it and smote the wicked woman so that her head was cleft from her shoulders. And her body fell across the board and her evil blood spurted forth upon that fair pastie pye. Then the Lord Redwald commanded that the master-cook should be bound with chains and flung into the fire of his own ovens. And this was done. But the faithful scullion-boy he rewarded well for his service and made him the heir of his whole estate. And the Lord Redwald grew old in that single night and a great sorrow took possession of his soul. Neither was he seen to smile ever after that and. . . . [*The manuscript is torn and frayed and the end missing.*]

THE SANDS OF DEE

By CHARLES KINGSLEY

(Reprint)

"O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home
Across the sands of Dee;"
The western wind was wild and dank with foam,
And all alone went she.

The western tide crept up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see.
The rolling mist came down and hid the land:
And never home came she.

"Oh! is it weed, or fish, or floating hair—
A tress of golden hair,
A drownèd maiden's hair
Above the nets at sea?
Was never salmon yet that shone so fair
Among the stakes on Dee."

They rowed her in across the rolling foam,
The cruel crawling foam,
The cruel hungry foam,
To her grave beside the sea:
But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home
Across the sands of Dee.

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

*No. 7. Wandering Willie's Tale**

By SIR WALTER SCOTT

"HONEST folks! How do ye ken whether I am honest, or what I am? I may be the deevil himsell for what ye ken, for he has power to come disguised like an angel of light; and, besides, he is a prime fiddler. He played a sonata to Corelli, ye ken."

There was something odd in this speech, and the tone in which it was said. It seemed as if my companion was not always in his constant mind, or that he was willing to try if he could frighten me. I laughed at the extravagance of his language, however, and asked him in reply if he was fool enough to believe that the foul fiend would play so silly a masquerade.

"Ye ken little about it—little about it," said the old man, shaking his head and beard, and knitting his brows. "I could tell ye something about that."

What his wife mentioned of his being a tale-teller as well as a musician now occurred to me; and as, you know, I like tales of superstition, I begged to have a specimen of his talent as we went along.

"It is very true," said the blind man, "that when I am tired of scraping thairm or singing ballants I whiles make a tale serve the turn among the country bodies; and I have some fearsome anes, that make the auld carlines shake on the settle, and the bits o' bairns skirl on their minnies out frae their beds. But this that I am going to tell you was a thing that befell in our ain house in my father's time—that is, my father was then a hafflins callant; and I tell it to you, that it may be a lesson to you that are but a young thoughtless chap, wha ye draw up wi' on a lonely road; for muckle was the dool and care that came o' 't to my gudesire."

He commenced his tale accordingly, in a distinct narrative tone of voice, which he raised and depressed with considerable skill; at times sinking almost into a whisper, and turning his clear but sightless eyeballs upon my face, as if it had been possible for him to witness the impression which his narrative made upon my features. I will not spare a syllable of it, although it be of the longest; so I make a dash—and begin:—

YE MAUN have heard of Sir Robert Redgauntlet of that ilk, who lived in these parts before the dear years. The country will lang mind him; and our fathers used to draw breath thick if ever they heard him named. He was out wi' the Hielandmen in Montrose's time; and again he was in the hills wi' Glencairn in the saxteen hundred and fifty-twa; and sae when King Charles the Second came in, wha was in sic favor as the laird of Redgauntlet? He was knighted at Lonon Court, wi' the king's ain sword; and being a red-hot prelatist, he came down here, rampauging like a lion, with commissions of lieutenancy (and of lunacy, for

*From "Redgauntlet."

what I ken), to put down a' the Whigs and Covenanters in the country. Wild wark they made of it; for the Whigs were as dour as the Cavaliers were fierce, and it was which should first tire the other. Redgauntlet was aye for the strong hand; and his name is kend as wide in the country as Claverhouse's or Tom Dalyell's. Glen, nor dargle, nor mountain, nor cave could hide the puir hillfolk when Redgauntlet was out with bugle and bloodhound after them, as if they had been sae mony deer. And, troth, when they fand them, they didna make muckle mair ceremony than a Hielandman wi' a roebuck. It was just, "Will ye tak' the test?" If not —"Make ready—present—fire!" and there lay the recusant.

Far and wide was Sir Robert hated and feared. Men thought he had a direct compact with Satan; that he was proof against steel, and that bullets happed aff his buff-coat like hailstanes from a hearth; that he had a mear that would turn a hare on the side of Carrifragauns; and muckle to the same purpose, of whilk mair anon. The best blessing they wared on him was, "Deil scowp wi' Redgauntlet!" He wasna a bad master to his ain folk, though, and was weel aneugh liked by his tenants; and as for the lackeys and troopers that rade out wi' him to the persecutions, as the Whigs caa'd those killing-times, they wad hae drunken themsells blind to his health at ony time.

Now you are to ken that my gudesire lived on Redgauntlet's grund—they ca' the place Primrose Knowe. We had lived on the grund, and under the Redgauntlets, since the riding days, and lang before. It was a pleasant bit; and I think the air is callerer and fresher there than onywhere else in the country. It's a' deserted now; and I sat on the broken doorcheek three days since, and was glad I couldna see the plight the place was in—but that's a' wide o' the mark. There dwelt my gudesire, Steenie Steenson; a rambling, rattling chiel he had been in his young days, and could play weel on the pipes; he was famous at "hoopers and girders," a' Cumberland couldna touch him at "Jockie Lattin," and he had the finest finger for the back-lilt between Berwick and Carlisle. The like o' Steenie wasna the sort that they made Whigs o'. And so he became a Tory, as they ca' it, which we now ca' Jacobites, just out of a kind of needcessity, that he might belang to some side or other. He had nae ill-will to the Whig bodies, and liked little to see the blude rin, though, being obliged to follow Sir Robert in hunting and hoisting, watching and warding, he saw muckle mischief, and maybe did some that he couldna avoid.

Now Steenie was a kind of favorite with his master, and kend a' the folk about the castle, and was often sent for to play the pipes when they were at their merriment. Auld Dougal MacCallum, the butler, that had followed Sir Robert through gude and ill, thick and thin, pool and stream, was specially fond of the pipes, and aye gae my gudesire his gude word wi' the laird; for Dougal could turn his master round his finger.

Weel, round came the Revolution, and it had like to hae broken the hearts baith of Dougal and his master. But the change was not a'thegether sae great as they feared and other folk thought for. The Whigs made an unco crawing what they wad do with their auld enemies, and in special wi' Sir Robert Redgauntlet. But there were owermony great folks dipped in the same doings to make a spick-and-span new warld. So Parliament passed it a' ower easy; and Sir Robert, bating that he was held to hunting foxes instead of Covenanters, remained just the man he

was. His revel was as loud, and his hall as weel lighted, as ever it had been, though maybe he lacked the fines of the nonconformists, that used to come to stock his larder and cellar; for it is certain he began to be keener about the rents than his tenants used to find him before, and they behooved to be prompt to the rent day, or else the laird wasna pleased. And he was sic an awsome body that naebody cared to anger him; for the oaths he swore, and the rage that he used to get into, and the looks that he put on made men sometimes think him a devil incarnate.

Weel, my gudesire was nae manager—no that he was a very great misguider—but he hadna the saving gift, and he got two terms' rent in arrear. He got the first brash at Whitsunday put ower wi' fair word and piping; but when Martinmas came there was a summons from the grund officer to come wi' the rent on a day preceese, or else Steenie behooved to flit. Sair wark he had to get the siller; but he was weel freended, and at last he got the haill scraped together—a thousand merks. The maist of it was from a neighbor they caa'd Laurie Lapraik—a sly tod. Laurie had wealth o' gear, could hunt wi' the hound and rin wi' the hare, and be Whig or Tory, saunt or sinner, as the wind stood. He was a professor in this Revolution warld, but he liked an orra sough of this warld, and a tune on the pipes, weel aneugh at a by-time; and, bune a', he thought he had gude security for the siller he len my gudesire ower the stocking at Primrose Knowe.

Away trots my gudesire to Redgauntlet Castle wi' a heavy purse and a light heart, glad to be out of the laird's danger. Weel, the first thing he learned at the castle was that Sir Robert had fretted himsell into a fit of the gout because he didna appear before 12 o'clock. It wasna a'thegether for sake of the money, Dougal thought, but because he didna like to part wi' my gudesire aff the grund. Dougal was glad to see Steenie, and brought him into the great oak parlor; and there sat the laird his leesome lane, excepting that he had beside him a great, ill-favored jackanape that was a special pet of his. A cankered beast it was, and mony an ill-natured trick it played; ill to please it was, and easily angered—ran about the haill castle, chattering and rowling, and pinching and biting folk, specially before ill weather, or disturbance in the state. Sir Robert caa'd it Major Weir, after the warlock that was burnt; and few folk liked either the name or the conditions of the creature—they thought there was something in it by ordinar—and my gudesire was not just easy in mind when the door shut on him, and he saw himsell in the room wi' naebody but the laird, Dougal MacCallum, and the major—a thing that hadna chanced to him before.

Sir Robert sat, or, I should say, lay, in a great armchair, wi' his grand velvet gown, and his feet on a cradle; for he had baith gout and gravel, and his face looked as gash and ghastly as Satan's. Major Weir sat opposite to him, in a red-laced coat, and the laird's wig on his head: and aye as Sir Robert girned wi' pain, the jackanape girned too, like a sheep's head between a pair of tangs—an ill-faur'd, fearsome couple they were. The laird's buff-coat was hung on a pin behind him, and his broadsword and his pistols within reach: for he keepit up the auld fashion of having the weapons ready, and a horse saddled day and night, just as he used to do when he was able to loup on horseback, and sway after ony of the hill-folk he could get speerings of. Some said it was for fear of the Whigs taking vengeance, but I judge it was just his auld custom—he wasna gine not fear onything. The rental book, wi' its black cover and

brass clasps, was lying beside him; and a book of sculduddery sangs was put betwixt the leaves, to keep it open at the place where it bore evidence against the goodman of Primrose Knowe, as behind the hand with his mails and duties. Sir Robert gave my gudesire a look, as if he would have withered his heart in his bosom. Ye maun ken he had a way of bending his brows that men saw the visible mark of a horseshoe in his forehead, deep-dinted, as if it had been stamped there.

"Are ye come light-handed, ye son of a toom whistle?" said Sir Robert. "Zounds! if you are——"

My gudesire, with as gude a countenance as he could put on, made a leg, and placed the bag of money on the table wi' a dash, like a man that does something clever. The laird drew it to him hastily. "Is all here, Steenie, man?"

"Your honor will find it right," said my gudesire.

"Here, Dougal," said the laird, "gie Steenie a tass of brandy, till I count the siller and write the receipt."

But they werena weel out of the room when Sir Robert gied a yelloch that garr'd the castle rock. Back ran Dougal; in flew the liverymen; yell on yell gied the laird, ilk ane mair awfu' than the ither. My gudesire knew not whether to stand or flee, but he ventured back into the parlor, where a' was gaun hirdie-girdie—naebody to say "come in" or "gae out." Terribly the laird roared for cauld water to his feet, and wine to cool his throat; and "Hell, hell, hell, and its flames," was aye the word in his mouth. They brought him water, and when they plunged his swoln feet into the tub, he cried out it was burning; and folks say that it *did* bubble and sparkle like a seething caldron. He flung the cup at Dougal's head and said he had given him blood instead of Burgundy; and, sure aneugh, the lass washed clotted blood aff the carpet the neist day. The jackanape they caa'd Major Weir, it jibbered and cried as if it was mocking its master. My gudesire's head was like to turn; he forgot baith siller and receipt, and downstairs he banged; but, as he ran, the shrieks came fainter and fainter; there was a deep-drawn shivering groan, and word gaed through the castle that the laird was dead.

WEEL, away came my gudesire wi' his finger in his mouth, and his best hope that Dougal had seen the money bag and heard the laird speak of writing the receipt. The young laird, now Sir John, came from Edinburgh to see things put to rights. Sir John and his father never 'greed weel. Sir John had been bred an advocate, and afterward sat in the last Scots Parliament and voted for the Union, having gotten, it was thought, a rug of the compensations—if his father could have come out of his grave he would have brained him for it on his awn hearthstane. Some thought it was easier counting with the auld rough knight than the fair-spoken young ane—but mair of that anon.

Dougal MacCallum, poor body, neither grat nor graned, but gaed about the house looking like a corpse, but directing, as was his duty, a' the order of the grand funeral. Now Dougal looked aye waur and waur when night was coming, and was aye the last to gang to his bed, whilk was in a little round just opposite the chamber of dais, whilk his master occupied while he was living, and where he now lay in state, as they caa'd it, weeladay! The night before the funeral Dougal could keep his awn counsel nae longer; he came doun wi' his proud spirit, and fairly asked auld Hutcheon to sit in his room with him for an hour. When they were in the round, Dougal took a tass of

brandy to himsell, and gave another to Hutcheon, and wished him all health and lang life, and said that, for himsell, he wasna lang for this warld; for that every night since Sir Robert's death his silver call had sounded from the state chamber just as it used to do at nights in his lifetime to call Dougal to help to turn him in his bed. Dougal said that, being alone with the dead on that floor of the tower (for naebody cared to wake Sir Robert Redgauntlet like another corpse), he had never daured to answer the call, but that now his conscience checked him for neglecting his duty; for, "though death breaks service," said MacCallum, "it shall never weak my service to Sir Robert; and I will answer his next whistle, so be you will stand by me, Hutcheon."

Hutcheon had nae will to the wark, but he had stood by Dougal in battle and broil, and he wad not fail him at this pinch; so doun the carles sat ower a stoup of brandy, and Hutcheon, who was something of a clerk, would have read a chapter of the Bible; but Dougal would hear naething but a blaud of Davie Lindsay, whilk was the waur preparation.

When midnight came, and the house was as quiet as the grave, sure enough the silver whistle sounded as sharp and shrill as if Sir Robert was blowing it; and up got the twa auld serving men, and tottered into the room where the dead man lay. Hutcheon saw aneugh at the first glance; for there were torches in the room, which showed him the foul fiend, in his ain shape, sitting on the laird's coffin! Ower he couped as if he had been dead. He could not tell how lang he lay in a trance at the door, but when he gathered himsell he cried on his neighbor, and getting nae answer raised the house, when Dougal was found lying dead within twa steps of the bed where his master's coffin was placed. As for the whistle, it was gane anes and aye; but mony a time was it heard at the top of the house on the bartizan, and amang the auld chimneys and turrets where the howlets have their nests. Sir John hushed the matter up, and the funeral passed ower without mair bogie wark.

But when a' was ower, and the laird was beginning to settle his affairs, every tenant was called up for his arrears, and my gudesire for the full sum that stood against him in the rental book. Weel, away he trots to the castle to tell his story, and there he is introduced to Sir John, sitting in his father's chair, in deep mourning, with weepers and hanging cravat, and a small walking rapier by his side, instead of the auld broadsword that had a hundredweight of steel about it, what with blade, chape, and basket hilt. I have heard their communings so often tauld ower that I almost think I was there mysell, though I couldna be born at the time. (In fact, Alan, my companion, mimicked, with a good deal of humor, the flattering, conciliating tone of the tenant's address and the hypocritical melancholy of the laird's reply. His grandfather, he said, had, while he spoke, his eye fixed on the rental book, as if it were a mastiff dog that he was afraid would spring up and bite him.)

"I wuss ye joy, sir, of the head seat and the white loaf and the brid lairdship. Your father was a kind man to freends and followers; muckle grace to you, Sir John, to fill his shoon—his boots, I suld say, for he seldom wore shoon, unless it were muils when he had the gout."

"Aye, Steenie," quoth the laird, sighing deeply, and putting his napkin to his een, "his was a sudden call, and he will be missed in the country; no time to set his house in order—weel prepared Godward, no doubt, which is the root of the matter; but left us behind a tangled hesp to wind, Steenie. Hem! hem! We maun go to

business, Steenie; much to do, and little time to do it in."

Here he opened the fatal volume. I have heard of a thing they call Doomsday-book—I am clear it has been a rental of back-ganging tenants.

"Stephen," said Sir John, still in the same soft, sleekit tone of voice—"Stephen Stephenson, or Steenson, ye are down here for a year's rent behind the hand—due at last term."

Stephen. Please your honor, Sir John, I paid it to your father.

Sir John. Ye took a receipt, then, doubtless, Stephen, and can produce it?

Stephen. Indeed, I hadna time, and it like your honor; for nae sooner had I set doun the siller, and just as his honor, Sir Robert, that's gane, drew it till him to count it and write out the receipt, he was ta'en wi' the pains that removed him.

"That was unlucky," said Sir John, after a pause. "But ye maybe paid it in the presence of somebody. I want but a *talis qualis* evidence, Stephen. I would go ower-strictly to work with no poor man."

Stephen. Troth, Sir John, there was naebody in the room but Dougal MacCallum, the butler. But, as your honor kens, he has e'en followed his auld master.

"Very unlucky again, Stephen," said Sir John, without altering his voice a single note. "The man to whom ye paid the money is dead, and the man who witnessed the payment is dead, too; and the siller, which should have been to the fore, is neither seen nor heard tell of in the repositories. How am I to believe a' this?"

Stephen. I dinna ken, your honor; but there is a bit memorandum note of the very coins, for, God help me! I had to borrow out of twenty purses; and I am sure that ilka man there set down will take his grit oath for what purpose I borrowed the money.

Sir John. I have little doubt ye *borrowed* the money, Steenie. It is the *payment* that I want to have proof of.

Stephen. The siller maun be about the house, Sir John. And since your honor never got it, and his honor that was canna have ta'en it wi' him, maybe some of the family may hae seen it.

Sir John. We will examine the servants, Stephen; that is but reasonable.

But lackey and lass, page and groom, all denied stoutly that they had ever seen such a bag of money as my gudesire described. What was waur, he had unluckily not mentioned to any living soul of them his purpose of paying his rent. Ae quean had noticed something under his arm, but she took it for the pipes.

Sir John Redgauntlet ordered the servants out of the room, and then said to my gudesire: "Now, Steenie, ye see ye have fair play; and, as I have little doubt ye ken better where to find the siller than ony other body, I beg in fair terms, and for your own sake, that you will end this fasherie; for, Stephen, ye maun pay or flit."

"The Lord forgie your opinion," said Stephen, driven almost to his wit's end—"I am an honest man."

"So am I, Stephen," said his honor; "and so are all the folks in this house, I hope. But if there be a knave among us, it must be he that tells the story he can not prove." He paused, and then added, mair sternly: "If I understand your trick, sir, you want to take advantage of some malicious reports concerning things in this family, and particularly respecting my father's sudden death, thereby to cheat me out of the money, and perhaps take away my character by insinuating that I have received the rent I am demanding. Where do you suppose this money to be? I insist upon knowing."

My gudesire saw everything look so muckle against him that he grew

nearly desperate. However, he shifted from one foot to another, looked to every corner of the room, and made no answer.

"Speak out, sirrah," said the laird, assuming a look of his father's, a very particular ane, which he had when he was angry—it seemed as if the wrinkles of his frown made that selfsame fearful shape of a horse's shoe in the middle of his brow; "speak out, sir! I *will* know your thoughts; do you suppose that I have this money?"

"Far be it frae me to say so," said Stephen.

"Do you charge any of my people with having taken it?"

"I wad be laith to charge them that may be innocent," said my gudesire; "and if there be any one that is guilty, I have nae proof."

"Somewhere the money must be, if there is a word of truth in your story," said Sir John; "I ask where you think it is—and demand a correct answer!"

"In hell, if you *will* have my thoughts of it," said my gudesire, driven to extremity—"in hell! with your father, his jackanape, and his silver whistle."

Down the stairs he ran (for the parlor was nae place for him after such a word) and he heard the laird swearing blood and wounds behind him, as fast as ever did Sir Robert, and roaring for the bailie and the baron-officer.

AWAY rode my gudesire to his chief creditor (him they caa'd Laurie Lapraik), to try if he could make onything out of him; but when he tauld his story he got but the worst word in his wame—thief, beggar, and dyvour were the saftest terms; and to the boot of these hard terms, Laurie brought up the auld story of dipping his hand in the blood of God's saints, just as if a tenant could have helped riding with the laird, and that a laird like Sir Robert Redgauntlet. My gudesire was, by this time, far beyond the bounds of patience, and, while he and Laurie were at deil speed the liars, he was wanchancie aneugh to abuse Lapraik's doctrine as weel as the man, and said things that garr'd folks' flesh grue that heard them—he wasna just himsell, and he had lived wi' a wild set in his day.

At last they parted, and my gudesire was to ride hame through the wood of Pitmurkie, that is a' fou of black firs, as they say. I ken the wood, but the firs may be black or white for what I can tell. At the entry of the wood there is a wild common, and on the edge of the common a little lonely change house, that was keepit then by an hostler wife—they suld hae caa'd her Tibbie Faw—and there puir Steenie cried for a mutchkin of brandy, for he had had no refreshment the haill day. Tibbie was earnest wi' him to take a bite of meat, but he couldna think o' 't, nor would he take his foot out of the stirrup, and took off the brandy wholly at two drafts, and named a toast at each. The first was, the memory of Sir Robert Redgauntlet, and may he never lie quiet in his grave till he had righted his poor bond tenant; and the second was, a health to Man's Enemy, if he would but get him back the pock of siller, or tell him what came o' 't, for he saw the haill world was like to regard him as a thief and a cheat, and he took that waur than even the ruin of his house and hauld.

On he rode, little caring where. It was a dark night turned, and the trees made it yet darker, and he let the beast take its ain road through the wood; when all of a sudden, from tired and wearied that it was before, the nag began to spring and flee and stend, that my gudesire could hardly keep the saddle. Upon the whilk, a horseman, suddenly riding up beside

him, said, "That's a mettle beast of yours, freend; will you sell him?" So saying, he touched the horse's neck with his riding wand, and it fell into its auld heigh-ho of a stumbling trot. "But his spunk's soon out of him, I think," continued the stranger, "and that is like mony a man's courage, that thinks he wad do great things."

My gudesire scarce listened to this, but spurred his horse, with "Gude e'en to you, freend."

But it's like the stranger was ane that doesna lightly yield his point; for, ride as Steenie liked, he was aye beside him at the selfsame pace. At last my gudesire, Steenie Steenson, grew half angry, and, to say the truth, half feard.

"What is it that you want with me, freend?" he said. "If ye be a robber, I have nae money; if ye be a leal man, wanting company, I have nae heart to mirth or speaking; and if ye want to ken the road, I scarce ken it mysell."

"If you will tell me your grief," said the stranger, "I am one that, though I have been sair miscaa'd in the world, am the only hand for helping my freends."

So my gudesire, to ease his ain heart, mair than from ony hope of help, told him the story from beginning to end.

"It's a hard pinch," said the stranger; "but I think I can help you."

"If you could lend the money, sir, and take a lang day—I ken nae other help on earth," said my gudesire.

"But there may be some under the earth," said the stranger. "Come, I'll be frank wi' you; I could lend you the money on bond, but you would maybe scruple my terms. Now I can tell you that your auld laird is disturbed in his grave by your curses and the wailing of your family, and if ye daur venture to go to see him, he will give you the receipt."

My gudesire's hair stood on end at this proposal, but he thought his companion might be some humorsome chiel that was trying to frighten him, and might end with lending him the money. Besides, he was bauld wi' brandy, and desperate wi' distress; and he said he had courage enough to go to the gate of hell, and a step farther, for that receipt. The stranger laughed.

WEEL, they rode on through the thickest of the wood, when, all of a sudden, the horse stopped at the door of a great house; and, but that he knew the place was ten miles off, my father would have thought he was at Redgauntlet Castle. They rode into the outer courtyard, through the muckle faulding yetts, and aneath the auld portcullis; and the whole front of the house was lighted, and there were pipes and fiddles, and as much dancing and deray within as used to be at Sir Robert's house at Pace and Yule, and such high seasons. They lap off, and my gudesire, as seemed to him, fastened his horse to the very ring he had tied him to that morning when he gaed to wait on the young Sir John.

"God!" said my gudesire; "if Sir Robert's death be but a dream!"

He knocked at the ha' door just as he was wont, and his auld acquaintance, Dougal MacCallum—just after his wont, too—came to open the door, and said, "Piper Steenie, are ye there, lad? Sir Robert has been crying for you."

My gudesire was like a man in a dream—he looked for the stranger, but he was gane for the time. At last he just tried to say: "Ha! Dougal Driveower, are you living? I thought ye had been dead."

"Never fash yoursell wi' me," said Dougal, "but look to yoursell; and see ye tak' naething frae onybody here, neither meat, drink, or siller, except the receipt that is your ain."

So saying, he led the way out through halls and trances that were weel kend to my gudesire, and into the auld oak parlor; and there was as much singing of profane sangs, and birling of red wine, and blasphemy sculduddery as had ever been in Redgauntlet Castle when it was at the blithest.

But Lord take us in keeping! What a set of ghastly revelers there were that sat around that table! My gudesire kend mony that had long before gane to their place, for often had he piped to the most part in the hall of Redgauntlet. There was the fierce Middleton, and the dissolute Rothes, and the crafty Lauderdale; and Dalyell, with his bald head and a beard to his girdle; and Earlshall, with Cameron's blude on his hand; and wild Bonshaw, that tied blessed Mr. Cargill's limbs till the blude sprung; and Dumbarton Douglas, the twice-turned traitor baith to country and king. There was the Bludy Advocate MacKenzie, who, for his warldly wit and wisdom, had been to the rest as a god. And there was Claverhouse, as beautiful as when he lived, with his long, dark, curled locks streaming down over his laced buff-coat, and with his left hand always on his right spule-blade, to hide the wound that the silver bullet had made. He sat apart from them all, and looked at them with a melancholy, haughty countenance; while the rest hallooed and sang and laughed, and the room rang. But their smiles were fearfully contorted from time to time; and their laughter passed into such wild sounds as made my gudesire's very nails grow blue, and chilled the marrow in his banes.

They that waited at the table were just the wicked serving men and troopers that had done their work and cruel bidding on earth. There was the Lang Lad of the Nethertown, that helped to take Argyle; and the bishop's summoner, that they called the Deil's Rattlebag; and the wicked guardsmen in their laced coats; and the savage Highland Amorites, that shed blood like water; and mony a proud serving man, haughty of heart and bloody of hand, cringing to the rich, and making them wickeder than they would be; grinding the poor to powder when the rich had broken them to fragments. And mony, mony mair were coming and ganging, a' as busy in their vocation as if they had been alive.

Sir Robert Redgauntlet, in the midst of a' this fearful riot, cried, wi' a voice like thunder, on Steenie Piper to come to the board-head where he was sitting, his legs stretched out before him, and swathed up with flannel, with his holster pistols aside him while the great broad-sword rested against his chair, just as my gudesire had seen him the last time upon earth; the very cushion for the jackanape was close to him; but the creature itsell was not there—it wasna its hour, it's likely; for he heard them say, as he came forward, "Is not the major come yet?" And another answered, "The jackanape will be here betimes the morn." And when my gudesire came forward, Sir Robert, or his ghaist, or the deevil in his likeness, said, "Weel, piper, hae ye settled wi' my son for the year's rent?"

With much ado my father gat breath to say that Sir John would not settle without his honor's receipt.

"Ye shall hae that for a tune of the pipes, Steenie," said the appearance of Sir Robert—"play us up Weel Hoddled, Luckie."

Now this was a tune my gudesire learned frae a warlock, that heard it when they were worshiping Satan at their meetings; and my gudesire had sometimes played it at the ranting suppers in Redgauntlet Castle, but never very willingly; and now he grew cauld at the very name of it, and said, for excuse, he hadna his pipes wi' him.

"MacCallum, ye limb of Beelzebub," said the fearfu' Sir Robert, "bring Steenie the pipes that I am keeping for him!"

MacCallum brought a pair of pipes might have served the piper of Donald of the Isles. But he gave my gudesire a nudge as he offered them; and looking secretly and closely, Steenie saw that the chanter was of steel, and heated to a white heat; so he had fair warning not to trust his fingers with it. So he excused himself again, and said he was faint and frightened, and had not wind aneugh to fill the bag.

"Then ye maun eat and drink, Steenie," said the figure; "for we do little else here; and it's ill speaking between a fou man and a fasting." Now these were the very words that the bloody Earl of Douglas said to keep the king's messenger in hand while he cut the head off MacLellan of Bombie, at the Threave Castle; and that put Steenie mair and mair on his guard. So he spoke up like a man, and said he came neither to eat nor drink, nor make minstrelsy; but simply for his ain—to ken what was come o' the money he had paid, and to get a discharge for it; and he was so stout-hearted by this time that he charged Sir Robert for conscience' sake (he had no power to say the holy name), and as he hoped for peace and rest, to spread no snares for him, but just to give him his ain.

The appearance gnashed its teeth and laughed, but it took from a large pocket-book the receipt, and handed it to Steenie. "There is your receipt, ye pitiful cur; and for the money, my dog-whelp of a son may go look for it in the Cat's Cradle."

My gudesire uttered mony thanks, and was about to retire. when Sir Robert roared aloud: "Stop, though, thou sack-doudling son of a ———! I am not done with thee. Here we do nothing for nothing; and you must return on this very day twelvemonth to pay your master the homage that you owe me for my protection."

My father's tongue was loosed of a suddenty, and he said aloud, "I refer myself to God's pleasure, and not to yours."

He had no sooner uttered the word than all was dark around him; and he sank on the earth with such a sudden shock that he lost both breath and sense.

How lang Steenie lay there he could not tell; but when he came to himself he was lying in the auld kirkyard of Redgauntlet parochine, just at the door of the family aisle, and the scutcheon of the auld knight, Sir Robert, hanging over his head. There was a deep morning fog on grass and gravestane around him, and his horse was feeding quietly beside the minister's twa cows. Steenie would have thought the whole was a dream, but he had the receipt in his hand fairly written and signed by the auld laird; only the last letters of his name were a little disorderly, written like one seized with sudden pain.

Sorely troubled in his mind, he left that dreary place, rode through the mist to Redgauntlet Castle, and with much ado he got speech of the laird.

"Well, you dyvour bankrupt," was the first word, "have you brought me my rent?"

"No," answered my gudesire, "I have not; but I have brought your honor Sir Robert's receipt for it."

"How, sirrah? Sir Robert's receipt! You told me he had not given you one."

"Will your honor please to see if that bit line is right?"

Sir John looked at every line, and at every letter, with much attention, and at last at the date, which my gudesire had not observed—"From my appointed place," he read, "this twenty-fifth of November."

"What! That is yesterday! Villain, thou must have gone to hell for this!"

"I got it from your honor's father; whether he be in heaven or hell, I know not," said Steenie.

"I will debate you for a warlock to the Privy Council!" said Sir John. "I will send you to your master, the devil, with the help of a tar barrel and a torch!"

"I intend to debate mysell to the Presbytery," said Steenie, "and tell them all I have seen last night, whilk are things fitter for them to judge of than a borrel man like me."

Sir John paused, composed himsell, and desired to hear the full history; and my gudesire told it him from point to point, as I have told it you—neither more nor less.

Sir John was silent again for a long time, and at last he said, very composedly: "Steenie, this story of yours concerns the honor of mony a noble family besides mine; and if it be a leasing-making, to keep yoursell out of my danger, the least you can expect is to have a red-hot iron driven through your tongue, and that will be as bad as scalding your fingers wi' a red-hot chanter. But yet it may be true, Steenie; and if the money cast up, I shall not know what to think of it. But where shall we find the Cat's Cradle? There are cats enough about the old house, but I think they kitten without the ceremony of bed or cradle."

"We were best ask Hutcheon," said my gudesire; "he kens a' the odd corners about as well as—another serving man that is now gane, and that I wad not like to name."

Aweel, Hutcheon, when he was asked, told them that a ruinous turret lang disused, next to the clock house, only accessible by a ladder, for the opening was on the outside, above the battlements, was called of old the Cat's Cradle.

"There will I go immediately," said Sir John; and he took—with what purpose heaven kens—one of his father's pistols from the hall table, where they had lain since the night he died, and hastened to the battlements.

It was a dangerous place to climb, for the ladder was auld and frail, and wanted ane or twa rounds. However, up got Sir John, and entered at the turret door, where his body stopped the only little light that was in the bit turret. Something flees at him wi' a vengeance, maist dang him back ower—bang! gaed the knight's pistol, and Hutcheon, that held the ladder, and my gudesire, that stood beside him, hears a loud skelloch. A minute after, Sir John flings the body of the jackanape down to them, and cries that the siller is fund, and that they should come up and help him. And there was the bag of siller sure aneugh, and mony orra thing besides, that had been missing for mony a day. And Sir John, when he had riped the turret weel, led my gudesire into the dining parlor, and took him by the hand, and spoke kindly to him, and said he was sorry he should have doubted his word, and that he would hereafter be a good master to him, to make amends.

"And now, Steenie," said Sir John, "although this vision of yours ends, on the whole, to my father's credit as an honest man, that he should, even after his death, desire to see justice done to a poor man like you, yet you are sensible that ill-dispositioned men might make bad constructions upon it concerning his soul's health. So, I think, we had better lay the haill dirdum on that ill-deedie creature, Major Weir, and say naething about your dream in the wood of Pitmurkie. You had ta'en ower-muckle brandy to be very certain about onything; and, Steenie, this receipt"—his hand shook while he held it out—"it's but a queer kind

of document, and we will do best, I think, to put it quietly in the fire."

"Odd, but for as queer as it is, it's a' the voucher I have for my rent," said my gudesire, who was afraid, it may be, of losing the benefit of Sir Robert's discharge.

"I will bear the contents to your credit in the rental book, and give you a discharge under my own hand," said Sir John, "and that on the spot. And, Steenie, if you can hold your tongue about this matter, you shall sit, from this time downward, at an easier rent."

"Mony thanks to your honor," said Steenie, who saw easily in what corner the wind was; "doubtless I will be conformable to all your honor's commands: only I would willingly speak wi' some powerful minister on the subject, for I do not like the sort of soumons of appointment whilk your honor's father——"

"Do not call the phantom my father!" said Sir John, interrupting him.

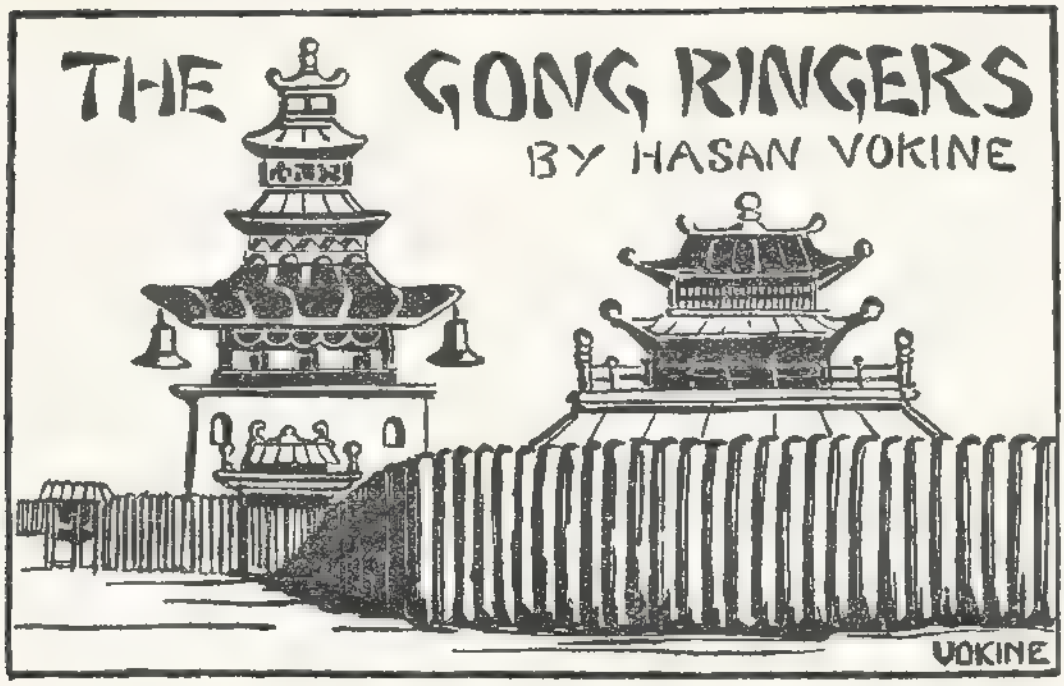
"Well, then, the thing that was so like him," said my gudesire; "he spoke of my coming back to see him this time twelvemonth, and it's a weight on my conscience."

"Aweel, then," said Sir John, "if you be so much distressed in mind, you may speak to our minister of the parish; he is a douce man, regards the honor of our family, and the mair that he may look for some patronage from me."

Wi' that, my father readily agreed that the receipt should be burned; and the laird threw it into the chimney with his ain hand. Burn it would not for them, though; but away it flew up the lum, wi' a lang train of sparks at its tail, and a hissing noise like a squib.

My gudesire gaed down to the manse, and the minister, when he had heard the story, said it was his real opinion that, though my gudesire had gane very far in tampering with dangerous matters, yet as he had refused the devil's arles (for such was the offer of meat and drink), and had refused to do homage by piping at his bidding, he hoped that, if he held a circumspect walk hereafter, Satan could take little advantage by what was come and gane. And, indeed, my gudesire, of his ain accord, lang forswore baith the pipes and the brandy—it was not even till the year was out, and the fatal day past, that he would so much as take the fiddle or drink usquebaugh or tippenny.

Sir John made up his story about the jackanape as he liked himsell; and some believe till this day there was no more in the matter than the filching nature of the brute. Indeed, ye'll no hinder some to thread that it was nane o' the auld Enemy that Dougal and Hutcheon saw in the laird's room, but only that wanchancie creature the major, capering on the coffin; and that, as to the blawing on the laird's whistle that was heard after he was dead, the filthy brute could do that as weel as the laird himsell, if not better. But heaven kens the truth, whilk first came out by the minister's wife, after Sir John and her ain gudeman were baith in the molds. And then my gudesire, wha was failed in his limbs, but not in his judgment or memory—at least naething to speak of—was obliged to tell the real narrative to his friends, for the credit of his good name. He might else have been charged for a warlock.



IT WAS in August, 1913, that I was connected with the Russo-Asian Trading Company and found it necessary to take a tiresome journey into southern Mongolia. After crossing the Siberian border we traveled not by camel but by horse, camping in the open and dining on canned foods and tea.

Just as bored, if not more so than I, were my traveling companions, Mr. Paul Karakhan, also a member of the Trading Company; Mr. Jim Howell, an American journalist; and the two guides. But when we arranged to stop at Kauban Ling, the seat of a rich Mongolian monastery, we were unconsciously preparing for one of those weird experiences which can happen only in the East.

With the sunset behind us, on the third evening we came in sight of the city of monks. The low walls appearing dark red in the fading light, the two ancient towers pointing silently into the sky, it seemed to vibrate a silence which put a deathlike spell over the whole surrounding desert. We felt its silence as something real, something hanging over it.

Our party stopped and the guides spoke wonderingly to each other. Why were the gates still closed? It was the custom when travelers approached the city to open the gates and send out an escort to meet them at a point exactly fifty *tashur* from the walls.

Gobel Dun, our translator, turned to us. His Mongolian mask bore an expression half of wonder, half of fear. "This very bad thing. Always see us when we cross that hill," he said, pointing to the slope back of us, where the sun was now disappearing. "Also time for Sunset Gong. Maybe better go back."

"Perhaps they are having a festival and have not seen us," suggested the American.

"No, no! Always have Sunset Gong, always, always! If Sunset Gong not ring, city be destroyed by thirty-seven demons. If no Sunset Gong, everybody dead."

Again we turned to the silent city. Its walls now dim and black, its gates

still mockingly closed, it struck the same note in our souls as does the sight of a skull uncovered in a field. The guide's suggestion was possible in the East where diseases are fought with painted dragons and the chanting of rituals.

But at that moment our bodies grew tense and even our horses seemed to withhold their movements. There had come to us the faint tap of a bell from one of those towers. Then again it sounded, hesitantly, as if the hammer were but laid on its edge.

No one breathed as we waited for the third stroke, expecting it to be louder. But what we heard was not the deep call of a gong. It was a wail, and screaming cries of pain, echoing over the desert. And again from the city all was silence.

Our two guides turned their horses around. Their faces were a sickly Oriental yellow. Their eyes stared toward the west, where there were still a few streaks of light. "We no go farther," said Gobel Dun. "Return quick."

Karakhan and I looked questioningly at each other. The American laughed. "Why go back just because you hear somebody yelling? Let's go see what it's all about."

But the Mongolians were already mounting the hill in back of us.

Karakhan spoke to me in Russian. "What do you think, friend?"

I shrugged my shoulders. *"Niechevo."* And we both found ourselves headed for the gate of the monastery following the American.

IN FRONT of the gate there was a great pile of white objects which appeared at first to be stones, but as we neared them we saw clearly that they were the bleached bones of human beings left there for the vultures.

A heavy wooden box braced with iron bands and fastened by an iron chain stood in their midst. Suddenly a hand thrust from a hole in the side shook the chain and words were cried out in Mongolian. It was a lama, condemned to die of starvation.

The walls of the city were made of logs and appeared much like the barricades made by the colonists in settling America. Behind and above them we could see the towers and buildings, made of mud at the base and topped with gayly painted wooden cupolas. Howell had dismounted, and finding the gates unfastened pushed them open. We slipped in noiselessly and stood against the wall. It was not a dead city that we found.

Until we grew accustomed to the place, our impressions were of torches, strange smells and a weird chant. Then, grouped at the foot of one of the towers we saw a motionless crowd of yellow-robed lamas. Three carried torches, the red lights of which fell on faces, awestruck, terrorized, as ghastly Mongol masks as the Orient knows. In the center of the crowd stood a tall man, the chief lama, with a brass hat and a red silk robe, the sleeves each a foot too long. From him came the chanting.

We wondered if we dared make our presence known. Then Karakhan, who had picked up a few words of Mongolian from the guides, spoke.

"Mendu! Isu noghoi." (Greetings! We are friends.)

Instantly every face was turned in our direction, some glowering, some fearful, some expressionless.

The silk-robed lama stepped up to us and bowed.

"Kubu wui tso lu pan? Muk ai?"

Karakhan shook his head and tried Chinese. The lama grinned. In a few minutes Karakhan turned to us.

"Fen Sho Tai, chief lama, wishes to say that he is the most unhappy man in the world to think that we were not welcomed to his humble monastery. But, he says, this is the most unfortunate temple in all Mon-

golia and if we had not entered the gates he would have advised us to pass on. Follow him."

The chief lama had motioned the gaping group aside and led the way to the foot of the tower. Then we saw what had caused the alarm. At our feet the lights of the torches fell upon a ghastly figure. It lay in a dark red pool, the yellow robe streaked with blood, the arms stretched out, the fingers clutching a small iron hammer, the face so disfigured and blood-stained as to be unrecognizable.

Through Karakhan the lama spoke again.

"Since the day of the Fire Dragon, four weeks ago, what you see here has happened at every ringing of the Sunset Gong. Priest Yu Yang was the first, and since then twenty-six others have been sacrificed to save our weak city from the vengeance of the thirty-seven devil gods. Only two strokes of the bell are given and the trembling ringer is thrown from the balcony, his face and hands mysteriously torn and bleeding, to be crushed to death at the bottom of the tower. Tomorrow lots will be drawn to choose a new ringer, and since you have entered our gates, you will be asked to join in the drawing. The most worthy Fire Dragon has been angered and his humble servants must appease him."

Fen Sho cracked his fan on the palm of his hand. Two lamas stepped up to him.

"Nai om chu yong."

They picked up their dead comrade and carried him through the gate. He would be laid on the pile of bones outside and by sunrise his would be picked as clean as the others.

The harsh call of a bird floated down to us from above. It was a vulture already impatient for the feast.

The other lamas filed out of the court, three taking our horses and our guns. Our party followed the swishing silk robes of the chief as he led us to a dark, bad-smelling compartment for sleeping, next to his own. There we threw ourselves on the straw-covered floor, and so exhausted were we that even the thought of the ghastly lottery planned for tomorrow could not keep us awake.

In the morning we were conducted to a larger compartment, where the whole lamasery was assembled to eat. There had already been some religious ceremony, accompanied by the blowing of long horn trumpets. It was this which had awakened us.

The meal consisted solely of mutton stew served on large brass platters. The method of eating it was to hold a large piece in the mouth with the left hand and with a knife in the right hand cut it off close to the lips. It was washed down with drafts of airak and kumyss.

After the meal was over Fen Sho spoke again to Karakhan in Chinese.

"He says that if we do not attempt to leave the inner court we will be left free to do as we please," Karakhan told us. "If there is anything among our luggage that we would like to have they will be glad to get it for us. I've ordered my cigarettes. Do you want anything?"

"Ask them for my pipe and plenty of tobacco," said Howell.

But it was not with free hearts that we spent that day, knowing that at sunset one of us or one of our captors would be sent to that sacrifice whose result we had seen last night. Even if it were not one of our own party we had no desire to see another man climb that dark tower, to hear again those screams of horror or to see that bleeding figure come tumbling down to crush itself on the floor.

"The worst of it," said Howell, "is not knowing what's really up there. It may be sheer fright that has killed all these chinks."

Karakhan lit a cigarette. "Sheer fright, Howell, will not tear a man's eyes out."

There was no luncheon, and the second meal of the day, which was served about 5 o'clock, was eaten very sparingly. The vultures could already be seen collecting on the cupolas and peaks of the buildings.

One giant one, almost the size of a man, had been preening himself on the peak of the gong tower all the afternoon and eying us mockingly. With his bald head and neck showing the discolored flesh he was hideous and had also attracted the attention of the Mongols, who called him *Shabu Khan* (The Bald King).

As the sun began to get low, the chief lama majestically entered the court. He was followed by two of his satellites, one carrying a small-mouthed brass jar, the other holding a tray of smooth white pebbles.

These stones, one of which had been painted red, were counted into the jar to equal the number of men present and vigorously shaken up by each lama. Then the drawing began. The lamas drew first, some with fear in their eyes, some with no more expression than if the stones had been sunflower seeds or sweetmeats.

Our party was at first uninterested. Out of eighty-seven lamas it was most probable that one of their party would get the red stone.

But more than half of them had drawn; yet the red stone had not appeared!

Karakhan's expression began to grow worried and he puffed harder at his cigarettes. The drawing went on. We eyed each lama as if we willed with all the power of our minds that he draw out that fatal-painted stone.

Now there were but three and Fen Sho left to draw. We began to suspect a trick.

But even the lamas were anxious now. A big fat one, who had been continually fumbling with the blue cord which belted him around the waist, put his hand into the jar, and beads of perspiration showed all over his face. Fearfully he looked at his draw. White! He sank back thankfully among his comrades.

Another white one came out.

A third!

Fen Sho was bowing and motioning to us.

Karakhan spoke to him in Chinese. He smiled maliciously and shook his head.

"He says the chief lama never draws!" gasped Karakhan harshly.

Now it was clear why the old devil submitted so placidly to the outrages of an angry Fire Dragon. For every lama who disappeared into that tower, his coffers were so much the richer. . . . Fen Sho was beating his fan nervously against his palm. . . . But it would not be a lama this time. There were three stones left in that jar and one of them was red! Shabu Khan looked pleased in contemplation of a change in diet.

Fen Sho was bowing again and motioning to the jar.

Howell stepped up to the jar. All were on tip-toe. His eyes were haggard as he felt in the bottom for one of the three remaining stones. He drew it out. It was red!

He tottered against the wall, but when we reached him to support him there was a grim smile on his lips.

Fen Sho nervously upturned the jar. Two small round white stones dropped out. He nodded wisely and motioned with his fan that we might see them. It was not a trick, perhaps, but it was ghastly luck.

Howell, his mouth still firm, asked through Karakhan if he might take with him his pistol and his flashlight.

Fen Sho frowned, then bowing with another grin, "You may have them," he said, "but they will be useless." A lama was dispatched for them.

Evidently Fen Sho really believed in the Fire Dragon, which was so obligingly filling his coffers with the gold of his followers.

The whole party filed into the outer court, the lamas, at their chief's order, lining themselves against the gate to prevent our escape. Karakhan and I stood in the middle of the court. Fen Sho, with two torch-bearers, waited at the foot of the tower.

Howell shook hands with us and stepped over to them. He was brave enough to laugh at his costume, which consisted of a yellow robe, a small red hat, and the hammer, which was fastened about his neck by a red cord. These were put on him by two of the lamas while Fen Sho chanted some ritual. Then, with his flashlight in one hand and his pistol in the other, he entered the tower.

"How soon," I wondered, "will that yellow Mongol robe be streaked with Aryan blood?"

The sky was black, but there were still some red streaks in the west and the red torches of the Mongols lit up the court. I looked up at the gong tower. It seemed to be dripping with blood. Shabu Khan, the giant vulture, had disappeared.

Going up the center of the tower was a rough wooden ladder. Howell grasped this and began to climb, gripping his pistol and flashlight tightly.

Even Fen Sho's face was worn and anxious as he saw him vanish into that black hole. It was another sacrifice to the Fire Dragon but it would mean nothing to Fen Sho. The wily chief would get nothing from Howell's luggage to equal the gold of his rich followers.

Part way up the mud base of the tower there was an opening. We saw him slowly pass it. When he reached the top it would be necessary for him to balance himself on an upper rung of the ladder and reach up with the hammer to the gongs which were in the very peak of the tower. The whole court held its breath as one body. We would not see but we would hear what happened. As yet, there had been no sound.

What was happening in the tower? Howell was approaching the top. With his flashlight he was searching the dark corners of the cupola. It revealed nothing, yet he had an uncanny sense that he was not alone there. He had almost reached the top of the ladder. Was it safe to try to stand on the topmost rung? It would be an uncertain foothold. He braced himself firmly between the ladder and the wall and determined to go no farther until he was sure of himself. Then suddenly there was a wild weird scream, and with a furious beating and flapping and tearing of claws, the *thing*, he knew not what it was, had pounced upon him. He covered his face with his arms and the creature tore at them and made shreds of the Mongol cloak. In another minute he would have lost his hold and have gone the way of the lamas before him.

Frantically, he pulled the trigger of his gun. Something fell the length of the tower and beat itself on the ground at our feet!

It was Shabu Khan, a red hole in his breast, his great wings spread wide on the ground, his malicious, hating eyes now lifeless.

What must have been Chinese jazz was being played on the gongs and in a minute Howell had slipped down the ladder and stood before us. One hand was bleeding where the vulture had torn it and his robe was in shreds. "There's your Fire Dragon," he said, as Fen Sho stupidly examined the vulture, "and now you can tell your thirty-seven devil gods to chase themselves."

The "angry god" who had killed so many lamas was only a crafty vulture.

The WANING

—A SERIAL NOVEL

The Story So Far

A voyage is made to Mars by Professor Bernard Palmer, his protegé Robert Sprague, and a stowaway reporter, Hugh Taggert of *The Chronicle*. They travel through space in the *Sphere*, which defies gravity because of the use of an element known as mythonite.

On Mars they become the guests, and later the prisoners, of the usurping emperor, Kharnov, who has imprisoned Hakon, governor of the polar regions, and his daughter Zola. As the emperor is trying to force Zola into an unwelcome marriage, the princess asks Robert to help her and her father to escape in the *Sphere*.

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AS THE twilight rapidly faded Robert observed with uneasiness that three Martians remained within the building where the *Sphere* was placed. His suspicion that they were spies was strengthened when one of them engaged him in conversation and inquired whether he might accompany him within the *Sphere* to learn something of its intricacies. The note of insistence in the Martian's voice convinced Robert that a refusal would be useless. He granted the request gracefully, biding his time until he felt sure the princess would be ready. Then it would be up to him to get rid of the spies in some manner. Just how he was to accomplish this he did not yet know.

The time agreed upon was immediately after the first sign of the rising moon, Phobus, above the horizon. Explaining the various features of the *Sphere* as vaguely as possible, Robert watched closely for the first glow of the planet's little moon. The several windows in the western end of the building offered a fair view of the horizon in that direction.

As the fateful hour approached, Robert determined to get the *Sphere* outside the building in some manner, in order that he would be best prepared to make a dash to the palace at the proper moment.

Accordingly, he informed the Martian with him that he intended to take the *Sphere* outside for a trial flight before leaving it, asking him whether he desired to accompany him or not. He was hoping, of course, that the Martian would say "no." He did not wish to seem desirous of getting rid of him for fear that his suspicion would be aroused.

As Robert had half expected, however, the Martian informed him politely that it was the emperor's wish that the *Sphere* not be taken out of the building for the present. It was plain that Robert would have to resort to strategy to carry out his plans.

Accepting the Martian's statement with apparent readiness and good nature, he remarked that he could just as well test the *Sphere* some other time, and prepared as if to leave it. He succeeded in maneuvering so as to follow the other out, though the Martian preceded him with evident reluctance.

Upon reaching the exit in the outer shell of the *Sphere* the spy turned as if minded to request Robert to precede him there. Realizing that it was now or never, Robert leaped upon him suddenly, delivering a sharp blow to the spy's jaw that sent him reeling down the few remaining steps and through the open trap on to the floor of the building. Simultaneously with the Martian's cry of baffled rage, Robert slammed the trap-door shut and raced up the steps. A moment later he had the gyrostats in motion.

OF A WORLD

By W. ELWYN BACKUS

His heart sank, though, as he saw all three of the Martians tugging at the massive door that stood between the *Sphere* and freedom. Already it was sliding to with their efforts. His escape was cut off!

For a moment Robert was tempted to press into service the automatic that reposed in a locker but a few feet away. But the thought of firing upon them in cold blood was repugnant to him. Apparently the Martians were unarmed. During their sojourn on Mars, Robert and his companions had not found out what kind of weapons the Martians used. Two of the Martians remained inside the great door, shouting to him to come out of the *Sphere*. The third had slipped out, no doubt to inform the emperor of his attempted escape.

The Martians' probable ignorance of the power of his automatic made it impracticable for Robert to attempt forcing them to open the door again. Then, suddenly, he remembered the tremendous lifting power of the *Sphere*, and a possible solution came to him. Carefully he maneuvered the *Sphere*, raising it slowly to the roof. As he felt the jar of the shell against the rafters he increased the lift. He could hear the building groan with the immense pressure. Then he opened the disk's surface to its maximum and switched on the current!

For a moment the *Sphere* swayed uncertainly as the stout rafters writhed against the tremendous power of the disk. Robert caught a glimpse of the Martians flattened against the door in consternation. The next instant the *Sphere* shot upward with a crash as the roof of the building collapsed behind it!

Instantly Robert shut off its lifting power, and began maneuvering the *Sphere* back downward and toward the palace.

FORTUNATELY the *Sphere* seemed undamaged by its unusual exit from the building. Within a minute after his escape Robert had it immediately over the palace gardens where the princess and his companions were to join him. The gardens were dark and forbidding-looking beneath him, though the ruddy orange rim of Phobus already was visible over the horizon's edge. As yet there was no sign of pursuit.

Softly the *Sphera* settled like a round, dark cloud. As it reached a level of perhaps thirty feet Robert saw a darker blotch on the expanse of lawn in back of the princess' quarters. Being sufficiently familiar with the garden to know that this was not a part of the shrubbery, he suspected and hoped that it was his friends awaiting him. He dared not show a light yet, but continued to settle as rapidly as was safe.

Then, to Robert's relief, a small, carefully shaded flashlight winked twice at him from below. This was the signal agreed upon.

A moment later the *Sphere* came to rest on the turf. A glance through the windows was sufficient to recognize his friends. Taggert came close and rapped on the glass. His low "Hurry" reached Robert in spite of the double panes.

Hurrying down the narrow steps he opened the manhole. The next instant he was helping the princess

into the dark passage which he dared not light yet. The flashlight which he also carried for this very emergency, however, enabled all to see their way quite well.

But their good fortune was not to continue indefinitely. Hardly had the princess and her father stepped into the *Sphere* when there came a sound of excited pursuit on the other side of the garden wall which divided the princess' section from theirs, and the garden gate burst open!

Urging the professor and Taggert into the *Sphere* hurriedly, Robert slipped the automatic out of his pocket, thanking his lucky stars that he had brought it with him. Without hesitation he blazed away over the heads of their pursuers as they rushed forward, hoping to halt them for an instant. But they seemed undaunted. On they came in great bounds, shouting excitedly.

Having done what he could to keep them away from the *Sphere,* Robert hurried into the passage just as the leader came up. As the latter darted after him Robert fired. The Martian went down, but the others pressed forward, brandishing saberlike weapons. Unable to lift the trap-door into place because of the body of the wounded Martian upon it, Robert was about to shout to Taggert to raise the *Sphere,* when one of the Martians leaped over his prostrate fellowman and struck at Robert with his weapon.

By an unlucky bit of chance the blade struck the automatic from Robert's hand even as he fired again. He could hear the gyrostats humming and had just presence of mind enough to yell to Taggert to raise the *Sphere* when there came a roar and a flash by his ear and the vicious Martian's weapon clattered on to the steps as he staggered back, blocking for a moment the others behind him. The rays from the small globe in the ceiling now lighted the passage.

"Close shave, Robert," came Professor Palmer's voice, and once more the roar of his firearm deafened them in the narrow passage.

The Martians' rush was checked for a moment, and in that instant they had lost. The *Sphere* trembled. As a great shout of baffled rage welled up from without, Robert knew that they finally were off. Stung by their failure, two Martians rushed at the manhole. One of them managed to grip the rungs outside. The next instant he was precipitated forcibly back to the ground as the *Sphere* shot upward, wrenching the rungs from his grasp. But Robert's earlier assailant still sprawled, wounded and partly dazed, upon the lower steps. Then, abruptly, before they could prevent it, he rolled off into space with a wild cry!

Slamming the manhole cover shut, Robert and the professor made their way up into the main chamber. The princess was waiting for Robert with great anxiety. There, for the first time, Robert met Hakon, her father, a dignified and robust man of middle age, with an imperious though pleasant manner. The beard, as affected by the emperor, was absent, but he wore a short, gray mustache that matched his heavy, graying hair.

"I can not express my gratitude for the service you and your companions are doing for my daughter and me, my friend," he said in a pleasing, resonant voice. "I can only say that you shall all be fittingly rewarded upon our arrival in my country."

"The privilege of rescuing your Highness and the princess is sufficient reward," replied Robert.

"Can't we go back and lick their army for you or something?" asked Taggert, looking at the princess in vast admiration.

"Our zealous companion possesses more enthusiasm than discretion," said Professor Palmer, at which they all laughed.

Reaching a height of about a thousand feet, Robert started the *Sphere* toward the region of the planet's north pole, having taken his direction from the slowly rising Phobus in the west after consultation with Professor Palmer and Zola's father.

Taggert volunteering his culinary services, they all indulged in a light repast of canned salmon, fresh baked biscuits, in which Taggert excelled, jelly and tea.

The distance from their previous position just south of the equator being roughly 3,500 miles from the northern pole, Robert estimated that they could easily reach Zola's country within six hours. However, as it would be more convenient as well as interesting to arrive after dawn he did not push the *Sphere*. Their royal passengers were greatly interested in its mysteries, and far into the night Robert explained the intricacies of the wonderful machine to Zola and her father. Finally, however, they accepted Robert's invitation to rest a few hours in one of the small rooms adjoining the main chamber, upon his promise to awaken them at dawn.

Shortly after they had retired, the gyrostats developed an overheated bearing, with the result that Robert was obliged to descend to a convenient expanse of desert to safely correct the trouble.

The remedy proved more difficult than expected and dawn was almost upon them by the time the *Sphere* was again ready for flight. Thereupon Robert decided to call their guests before taking flight.

The princess, in some manner unknown to most women, appeared looking fresh and lovely as she stepped from the *Sphere* out into the rosy flush of the new dawn.

"Oh, it's so good to get out into the open once more, and to know that we are free," she cried. "It seems ages since we were made prisoners by that frightful usurper. How can we ever thank you enough?"

"Ah, princess, your happiness more than repays me," replied Robert, who found himself strolling beside her.

Together they watched the eastern sky grow rapidly brighter while the others stood apart as if understanding their unvoiced desire to be alone.

"A strange dream came to me recently," she murmured. "This brings it all back. I dreamed that I was alone in a vast jungle of horrible, twisted growths of huge thorns from which I could find no escape."

"Then you came upon a small clearing," Robert interrupted before he thought.

"Why—how did you know?" she breathed, her eyes alight with astonishment.

"I—I was there. That is, I, too, dreamed that I was there and that you came."

The sun's dazzling edge peered over the rim of the horizon, its warm rays nestling in her pale gold hair.

"And did—did you—oh, I know it sounds absurd—but did you not see me one night off in space as you journeyed to me in your wonderful *Sphere?*"

"That is how you knew I would come to you? How well do I remember! But then, as before, you slipped away from me. I have a terrible fear you will fade away, leaving me but a dream to remember you by."

"No, no, no!" she cried earnestly; and then, as if suddenly embarrassed by the subtle admission just made, she flushed and turned away. As they walked quietly back toward the *Sphere* where the others waited there was a song in Robert's heart.

ONCE more they embarked on their journey toward the polar region. The gyrostats now operated faultlessly. Robert rose slowly to an altitude of about 2,000 feet.

Since their arrival on Mars Robert and Professor Palmer had established the existence of the canals, or ducts, thereby settling for all time—provided they succeeded in returning safely to Earth—the controversy over the most noted characteristic of Mars as seen from the Earth, the curious network of lines. Incidentally, they had seen the Martian deserts as well as both rural and city life on the planet. They were informed as to the correctness of their original conjecture as to the method of pumping the water from the poles to all sections of the globe. This was accomplished by means of electric pumping stations at intervals along each duct, the rays of the sun being absorbed and converted into electric energy for this purpose by the big checker-board structures.

But the feature which, so far, had defied plausible explanation by all experts of our world, still remained a riddle to the adventurers. This was the "carets," or triangular-shaped points which existed wherever the canals were seen to connect with one of the large, shaded regions.

These shaded regions also were a riddle. A theory that the latter were seas was exploded by the fact that in some instances the canal lines were visible running across them. For another thing it was agreed by practically all experts that the seas on Mars had long since dried up.

It was, therefore, with considerable excitement that Professor Palmer observed that they were nearing one of these regions. From a height of several thousand feet one of the "carets" could be seen plainly as they approached it.

As Robert lowered the *Sphere* toward it, Hakon showed signs of uneasiness. Still he held his peace until it became quite evident to him that his hosts intended approaching close to this section. Zola, too, was evidently perturbed.

"There is danger there, gentlemen," said Hakon, finally. "I beg of you, do not go too close."

"What is it?" questioned Professor Palmer, now intensely interested. Both he and Robert received the impression that some terrible physical force connected with the phenomenon threatened their safety. But in this they were quickly disillusioned by Hakon.

"We are now in the region of the usurper's strongest support," he told them. "It was the hotbed of traitors before he stole the throne, executing many of my loyal leaders. These people have, no doubt, been notified to be on the lookout for us and will try to destroy us with their *hilwai* if we approach within range."

Hakon explained further that *hilwai* were a kind of large gun, electrically operated, in lieu of the obsolete kind in which explosives had been used in previous centuries, before the planet's mineral supply had been virtually exhausted. These guns had a range of about twenty miles horizontally. Though this was not a very great disance, considering the weak gravity on Mars, it was sufficient to make it uncomfortably dangerous for them if they undertook to view the "caret" at close range.

Hakon was surprized to learn of their curiosity regarding the dark blotches and their caret-shaped junctures wherever they were joined to a canal, and readily explained this phenomenon.

"The dark regions are vast, low sections which were covered by seas ages ago," he informed them. "The carets are formed by two branches from the main canal where it enters the low region. From these fanlike branches, and the main canal which crosses the bottom, the low country extending beyond is fed. Thus the lowlands, which formerly formed the sea bottom, are cultivated, resulting in the largest, richest and most pro-

ductive regions on the planet. Even small, precious lakes are formed in the lowest spots, and occasionally there are light falls of rain, which are unknown in any other parts of the planet."

Circling this region at a comfortable height, the adventurers examined it in turn through a telescope. What they saw tallied with Hakon's explanation. The denser vegetation, fed directly from the main canal running across the bottom, appeared as a slightly darker strip. Two small lakes were visible. Both of these appeared to be only a mile or two in circumference. The western edge of the low region was hidden in a light cloud bank.

Leaving this region behind, Robert pushed on toward the polar region ahead at full speed. After an hour had passed thus, Hakon suggested descending closer to the surface, that he might watch for landmarks to direct them to their objective. Though the country here looked much like that near the equator, there seemed to be fewer canals; at any rate, there were fewer latitudinal canals, for they had crossed very few during the last half hour. However, they had the opportunity of observing one of the "double" canals, which was really two canals running parallel, some seventy-five miles apart. Hakon explained that this was in order to take advantage of exceptionally productive districts which justified this deviation from the regular scheme.

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In this manner they neared what was perhaps the most northerly intersection of canals on the planet. Hakon directed Robert to land within the metropolis, which he called Svergad, situated in the center of the great oasis at this intersection.

Any doubt which Robert and his companions might have had regarding their reception in this new region was dispelled by the happy expression of anticipation on the princess' countenance as they approached the large oasis which extended over the entire section between the two parallel canals where a third canal intersected them. It was plain that she was overjoyed at the prospect of returning to her beloved country.

They dropped swiftly. Guided by Hakon, Robert finally brought the *Sphere* to rest in a large, open area paved with huge, grayish stones. These formed a vast courtyard behind a huge building of similar material. All around them reared impressive buildings, while the roofs of still others extended as far as they could see in all directions. They appeared to be in the heart of a metropolis that compared favorably with the one in which they had been captives. The large building adjoining the courtyard Robert correctly judged to be Hakon's palace.

There was almost a total absence of foliage. This, Robert subsequently found out, was due to the odd indifference of the people of this country to the beauties of foliage, though water in this region was more plentiful than in the equatorial regions.

A number of men appeared from within the palace and approached them as Robert assisted the princess to alight from the *Sphere*, followed by Hakon and the others.

As those approaching recognized them they hurried forward with evident delight, greeting them with demonstrations of deep regard. Hakon presented Robert and his companions to those assembled, telling of their aid and praising Robert especially in highest terms. That they were from another planet seemed no news. It was evident that the information as to the *Sphere's* arrival on Mars had already reached its farthest corners through the excellent system of wireless communication of which the Martians were masters.

They were promptly established in the palace as guests of highest honor. While separate apartments were offered each of them, at their mutual request Robert, Professor Palmer and Taggert were once more installed in one apartment where they could be constantly in one another's company. Every convenience and luxury were theirs. At Hakon's suggestion, an instructor called upon them every day to help them improve their knowledge of the Martian tongue, which service they were glad to avail themselves of, particularly Robert, who wished to be able to talk to the princess with less awkwardness.

The princess and her father visited them once or twice every day, while Professor Palmer became a great favorite with the learned men of the city, to whom he delighted in talking of the two planets, comparing astronomical data. In addition, the princess insisted upon Robert's being with her every evening, and their acquaintance ripened into a great friendship. Robert found himself deeply in love with her, as indeed did everyone who knew her. But with Robert it was different. He felt as if he had known her always. He was ready to make any sacrifice for her, and began to wonder where all this was leading.

Meanwhile, Hakon had dispatched an ultimatum to the emperor, and was awaiting his response. Controlling, as he did, the water supply to virtually the entire northern hemisphere and part of the southern one, Hakon possessed a powerful weapon, though the usurper had by far the larger army.

It was during this period of tense waiting that Robert asked Hakon whether he had any objection to their visiting the reservoirs from which the canals were supplied, before the winter season was upon them. With customary acquiescence the latter readily offered to furnish them with a guide and any other assistance which they required for the trip.

17

ROBERT took leave of the princess with considerable reluctance. Never had he been able to entirely overcome a strange foreboding that sometime they would be separated and never see each other again.

Something of the same premonition must have been present in the princess' mind that morning, for she seemed reluctant to let him go.

"I am sure that I'm selfish in saying it, but I do so wish you were not going on this journey. I won't rest until I see you back."

Her solicitude touched Robert deeply. As yet he had not told her of his love. Who was he to declare love to a princess? But he was sorely tempted to take her in his arms then and there—to tell her what was in his heart.

"It is but little more than a day's journey there and back," he replied, his voice a-quaver with the lure of her. "This is one of the chief features of your planet which the professor determined to defy the dangers of space to see. We must not disappoint him."

"But it has proved fatal to many, and even your wonderful *Sphere* may not return. Will you not let them go alone—Ro-bert?"

She pronounced his name quaintly, like "Roe-bert." It was the first time she had attempted to call him by his name, which she had heard his companions use. His pulse beat madly.

"Tell me," he breathed, "do you care—Zola?"

She blushed adorably.

"Yes—Ro-bert."

His arms were suddenly about her. She buried her head on his shoulder with a little sigh, and clung to him.

"Now, you will not go?" she asked presently.

"I must, beloved," he replied, tenderly. "They still depend upon me to operate the *Sphere* safely in an emergency. I can not refuse the professor this service. Why, if it hadn't been for him, I could not have come to Mars, and you would still have been the emperor's prisoner."

"You are right. I'm afraid I am just a selfish girl with foolish fears. You must hurry now and come back to me quickly, dear."

So they parted, Robert promising to come back to her as soon as possible, each striving to conquer a nameless fear that they would never see each other again.

A few hours later found the *Sphere* approaching the pole at a tremendous speed. Accompanying Robert and his companions were three Martian experts. Two of these were astronomers; the other, a professor of physics, acted as their guide.

Far away to the north a comparatively small expanse of white indicated what remained of the great polar cap of ice and snow that, during the winter, extended over the entire region.

"How is the water from the melting snows accumulated for distribution?" Taggert asked.

"As the spring advances, and the edges of the vast polar cap of snow begin to melt, the water is collected in the sea basins," explained the professor of physics.

"But the task of running the great ducts beneath the shores of these seas in order to connect with and drain their lowest points seems almost an impossible one."

"Quite true. That plan was finally rejected for that very reason. A system of siphons was built instead. Even this must have been a tremendous task—our history records that it required more than a century to complete it; yet so remarkable was this construction that the original work, now many centuries old, still remains in perfect condition."

Robert dropped the *Sphere* to within a half mile of the surface. They were passing over what appeared to be a great basin of some sea. Continuing northward they passed beyond the first great basin and over several smaller ones. The white polar cap was less than thirty miles away. As they neared it a small expanse of water in the lowest depressions of the basin became visible.

"Ah, that must be one of the siphons!" exclaimed Professor Palmer, pointing.

A small, sinuous ridge ran from the south along the bottom of the basin, disappearing in the little patch of water.

"Yes, that is one of them," confirmed their guide. "No doubt it is perplexing to you as to how each canal is supplied with water without interruption as the water in the seas and the polar cap is consumed and recedes."

"That is true," admitted Professor Palmer.

"The people of our planet have long been masters of electricity. In fact, it has been the only available source of power on Mars for centuries. This power is utilized to manipulate the valves in the various siphons which feed each canal, insuring its usefulness until the last portion of the polar cap is virtually exhausted. Accurate maps of all polar sea basins exist, of course. The pumping station nearest the pole, on each canal, has one of these maps indicating every siphon and valve feeding that canal. As the water from the nearest basin is exhausted, the valve of that feed is closed by

manipulation of a corresponding switch in the station, and one of the other feeds is opened. A chart of the retrogression of the seas with the declining season enables the attendant to drain each sea basin completely in its proper turn as the melting snow recedes."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Robert and Professor Palmer in unison.

Taggert was busily scribbling in his notebook.

In a short while the *Sphere* had reached the edge of the snow-cap. Immediately below, and stretching away some distance to the south and west, was a small sea, still well filled but covered with a smooth sheet of ice which reflected the rays of the low sun in a blinding, yellow blaze.

At the suggestion of their guide, Robert raised the *Sphere* till it was perhaps a mile high. From this point of vantage they could see the full extent of the polar cap. It seemed to be about twenty-five miles in diameter. They fancied they could see some of the canals beyond its farthest edge, though they could not be certain, because of a slight murkiness in the atmosphere in that direction.

Robert now lowered the *Sphere* almost to the surface of the snow and for a time they hovered over various parts of the cap. Quite different was this polar region from that of the Earth, for it was almost entirely one continuous, level sheet of snow and ice, without the great, towering icebergs and the mountain peaks which we associate with the arctic regions of our own world.

So far, their polar excursion had proved quite tame. Remembering the princess' anxiety, Robert wondered whether it had been due entirely to imagination. He questioned the Martians as to the possible dangers of the region. They replied that, during the winter season, the region was noted for its sudden and terrific blizzards, which lasted for weeks at a time. According to them, the approaching winter was not expected to break for some weeks yet.

By common consent, the *Sphere* was landed on the shore of the sea which seemed to surround the shrunken cap. A layer of crystal-like ice stretched off in three directions, unbroken except along the shore, where it was evident that the water beneath the ice was still being withdrawn, for the ice cakes were deposited in huge blocks on the sloping shore for several hundred yards beyond its present edge.

As they stepped from the protection of the *Sphere's* comfortable warmth the cold surprized them in its intensity, in spite of the heavy coats which they had donned for the occasion. A sharp breeze blew from across the polar cap. The horizon in that direction was partly hidden by the increasing murkiness which they had observed before from above.

A short walk along the shore before resuming their way back to the capital was suggested. Accordingly the little company picked their way over the rugged bottom above the broken incline of ice.

Queer shells and curious bits of rock were strewn about underfoot. Robert picked up a quantity of the prettiest specimens and put them in his pocket. Some were of the most beautiful tint, ranging from a delicate pink to an intense cerise, while others were of equally delightful shades of almost every color in the rainbow.

While their progress was slow over the rough ground, they found that they had covered nearly a mile at the end of some twenty minutes. The sea-bottom offering little further interest, it was decided to return to the *Sphere*, especially as the sky was assuming a peculiar aspect. It seemed as if they were surrounded by a

shrinking circle of darkness. The evident uneasiness of the Martians was anything but reassuring to Robert and his companions. All were plainly anxious to get back safely into the protecting walls of the *Sphere*.

"I hope one of these Martian blizzards doesn't surprize us," remarked Taggert, eying the horizon speculatively, as they hurried along.

The blackening horizon seemed to be racing toward them.

"Frankly, I don't like the looks of it," said one of the Martians. "I believe we are in for a winter storm, which is likely to be none the less severe for its earliness."

"I have observed the progress of one of these polar storms from the Earth," contributed Professor Palmer. "Within twenty-four hours it had transformed this very pole from a cap of insignificant size to an expanse of snow extending over nearly a quarter of the northern hemisphere."

A sudden flurry of large but scattered flakes of snow seemed to burst out of nowhere as he spoke.

"Well, it looks as if you are going to have a taste of one anyway," Taggert cried.

The *Sphere* was still quite plainly visible in the distance. But, probably because of the falling snow, the *Sphere* seemed rather to have got farther away during the last few minutes instead of closer. Robert was conscious of a strange foreboding as he quickened his pace over the rough ground with the others.

18

THE flurry quickly became a determined snowfall. The beautiful big flakes swirled round them dizzily, all but obscuring the *Sphere* entirely from view. However, the ice would serve to guide them in case the *Sphere* became invisible.

Resort to this method of guidance soon was a necessity. It proved to be not so simple as expected; for, as the flakes fell faster and faster, the great cakes of ice were not visible until they were almost upon them, and then they had an awkward habit of appearing only after the adventurers had fallen over them.

Stumbling along, with Professor Palmer keeping pace with difficulty beside him, Robert felt that surely they must have passed the *Sphere* already. It seemed to him that they had walked two miles or more since they had turned back, and still the *Sphere* could not be seen. He turned an instant and looked back half expecting to catch a glimpse of it behind. Taggert trudged along a few feet back; the others were strung out two or three yards in the rear.

A minute later Robert heard a muffled cry behind him. He turned just in time to see Taggert fall and slip from view in the blinding snow. Robert took a quick step to the reporter's aid. The next instant his feet shot from under him and he tobogganed down the slippery incline of ice toward the sea.

One thought reassured him as he felt the smooth surface racing past him: the level, unbroken expanse of ice over the sea would surely stop him when he reached it. But, hard on the heels of this thought, came the realization that, with all sense of direction lost out on the expanse of ice in a blinding snow, he might blunder farther and farther away from the *Sphere*. He earnestly hoped that the end of his slide would at least bring him close to Taggert.

Presently he reached the bottom of the incline and shot out over the smooth, frozen surface of the sea. Here his momentum was quickly checked. As soon as he could regain his feet he stood up and peered round him. But only the driving snow,

which all but obscured his hand before him, rewarded his gaze. He shouted several times, listening intently after each call. The snow seemed to muffle his cries in the making. Nothing was visible round him but a wall of snowflakes. His ears tingled with the bitter cold even under the fur cap he wore. He shouted again, removing his cap to listen afterward.

A faint answering cry floated back to him; but whether this was simply the rebound of his own cry from the dense wall of snow he did not know. As he continued to listen the same faint cry again came to him, this time a bit stronger, seemingly from away to his left. He clapped his cap on and strode off in that direction.

Several times he called out again, stopping to listen each time. Again that faint echo mocked him, but this time it seemed to come from behind. The well-known difficulty of determining the direction from which a sound comes in a fog came to Robert's mind, and he despaired as he realized the same difficulty in attempting to find a distant call in the falling snow.

Just then the cry sounded again, and this time it was undeniably plainer. Robert shouted in reply and was overjoyed to hear it once more increased in volume. He hurried toward it, shouting and listening alternately.

A moment later Taggert strode from out of the white veil.

"The wandering echo found at last," Robert greeted him, while they pounded each other on the back in joyous relief.

"Where in Sam Hill are we?" Taggert wanted to know.

"Question is, in which direction is the *Sphere?*" cried Robert.

"Well put. What's the answer?"

"Have you any idea from what direction you slid out here?"

"Nope. Have you?"

They stared at each other blankly. Then the ridiculousness of their cross-questioning struck them and they laughed together. For the moment the seriousness of their plight was forgotten. The white flakes swirled about them, settling upon their heads and shoulders till they looked like snow-men.

An idea suddenly occurred to Robert.

"This storm arrived from ahead of us when we were on our way back to the *Sphere*, didn't it?" he asked.

"Believe it did," agreed Taggert.

"Well, then, unless the direction of the wind has changed, we have only to push on at right angles to it, with it blowing on our left, to eventually come upon the shore which we left."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Taggert, after a moment's reflection.

So they pushed ahead in the direction indicated for several minutes, making fair progress in spite of the rapidly increasing wind which swept the smooth ice clean, leaving a difficult footing. Each minute they expected to come upon the slope up the shore, where they hoped to find a crevice in the raised cakes which would offer sufficient footing to scramble up the slick incline to the ground beyond. Still the blank wall of driven white revealed nothing but the level floor of ice, ever stretching a few feet ahead of them as they shuffled along.

"Seems as if we should have raised something by this time," said Taggert presently.

"The wind must have shifted," said Robert. "If it hasn't changed much, though, we should reach the shore anyway soon."

So they continued onward, half blinded by the snow, the bitter wind whipping round their bodies. With each step the hope of reaching the *Sphere* became weaker. The princess' anxiety recurred to Robert as he

plodded doggedly on ahead of Taggert. He wondered dully whether he should ever see her again. Well, at any rate, she was once more safely within her own country. He was thankful for that much. His reflections were cut short suddenly as he sprawled forward upon the ice, tripping up Taggert, who was following him closely. Caught unawares, Robert fell on all fours, knocking the breath out of him.

"'T'ell!" spluttered Taggert, scrambling up.

As Robert also struggled to his knees he saw that he had tripped over a crevice in the ice. It was the edge of a slightly higher block which sloped upward. The realization came to him suddenly that they had finally reached their first goal!

After some difficulty they managed to clamber up one of the perpendicular cracks between the slippery blocks.

Upon reaching the ground, where the snow had now collected several inches deep, they looked about eagerly but in vain for some sign of the *Sphere*, or of their erstwhile companions.

"There is nothing for us to do but to plod on against the wind until we reach the point where we left the *Sphere*," said Robert. "We should be near where we slipped down before."

"Lead on," said Taggert.

ONCE more they plodded ahead, keeping close to the ice blocks on their left. The now fine snow drove directly into their faces with stinging force, making it almost impossible to keep their eyes open enough to see.

For half an hour they pursued their way painfully. Only the exertion kept them from freezing in the increasing cold. The fierce wind whined about them hungrily, pitilessly, as if eager to make an end of them; while the eddies and drifts of snow round each depression or rock grew steadily deeper and more nearly impossible for them to plow through as their strength waned.

Robert realized that ere this they should certainly have reached the vicinity of the *Sphere*, but the snow restricted their view to a radius of less than ten feet. Unless they were fortunate enough to run right up on the *Sphere*, their chances of sighting it were remote. Even now they had lost touch with the border of ice, and, but for the uniform slope of the ground, and the general direction of the wind, would not have known whether they were still following the shore in the original direction or not. They shouted together many times but got no response. The snowfall and howling wind so muffled their cries that they despaired of being heard. Having continued on for some minutes longer they decided finally to go no farther, as they were convinced that they had already passed the point where they had left the *Sphere*. A convenient rock, some ten feet high and of about the same breadth, offered temporary shelter.

"If Professor Palmer fired a shot we should hear it here," Taggert suggested.

"I doubt it," replied Robert. "This hubbub and the muffling effect of the snowfall might drown a report within a hundred yards."

Here a startling thought occurred to Robert. What if the Martians took advantage of Professor Palmer's isolation and made off with the *Sphere*?

"Why the silence and corrugated brow?" queried Taggert. "An idea?"

"An idea, but no good," Robert responded, forcing a grin.

"Well, you needn't grin about it. I don't see anything comical about the prospect of being buried under

several tons of snow," chided Taggert.

The wind had fashioned a sheltered hollow in the lee of the rock where they had taken refuge. The intense cold which prevailed in spite of the heavy snowfall, however, made it imperative that they keep in motion to avoid being frozen. Already Robert recognized a warning feeling of drowziness. He shook himself alert with an effort.

"Can't sit here," he said, suiting the action to the word by rising and stamping his feet. Stabbings as of a thousand needles seemed to run through them at first. If only there were some fuel! Matches they had in plenty.

Taggert struck a listening attitude. A familiar humming was faintly audible above the whine of the blizzard!

Together they listened with bated breath as the humming grew plainer. Alas, a few moments later it passed away, and with it went their hopes.

"Missed us," ejaculated Taggert, with an involuntary oath.

The realization that the *Sphere* had just passed them by in a vain search for them brought their already drooping spirits to zero for a while. Here had been safety and comfort within perhaps a few rods, and they had been unable to make their presence known. Robert pictured Professor Palmer's anxious gaze as he peered downward into the veil of flying snow.

"Cheer up, Tag," Robert admonished, with an attempt at enthusiasm which his feelings belied. "The professor will be doubling back trying to find us. He'll run up on us yet."

"Maybe he will—if he doesn't bounce the old ball into the lake," replied Taggert, doubtfully. "Say, I wish one of us had brought a 'gat' along so that we could signal him if he gets near us again."

For several minutes they stamped about their cramped shelter, beating their arms round their bodies in an effort to keep up their circulation. As the time slipped by without further sound of the *Sphere* their hopes dropped still lower. The situation was becoming desperate.

Their dismal reflections were abruptly interrupted by a resumption of the humming sound, heralding the approach of the *Sphere* again. Both men stiffened, listening intently, the spark of revived hope burning again within their breasts as the fleeting moments passed. Would the *Sphere* come close enough in this game of blind man's buff to discover them? Or would it pass them by again, leaving them finally to their doom?

The prospect of freezing to death in the arctic region of a strange planet seemed a dreadful thing. In the heat of battle a man may find death in the midst of wild enthusiasm and patriotism. But here, hemmed in by a wall of beautiful, but deadly, flying flakes, there was no excitement to mask the death awaiting them—only a fearful realization of their fate, millions of miles away from their countrymen—alone! Yet in those fateful moments Robert's thoughts were mainly of Zola. Would he ever see her again?

With leaping heart he realized that the *Sphere* was coming closer—closer than before. He strained his eyes as he endeavored to pierce the intangible walls of their vast prison. Ah, what was that dark blur hurtling through the white froth? It was passing them by again. He joined with Taggert in his shouts. Fools, to think their muffled cries could rise above the tumult of the gale and the whir of the *Sphere's* machinery, piercing its thick, metal walls!

The fast-fading blur seemed to pause in its flight a moment. But even as they dared to hope, it passed out of sight again. Then quite abruptly it appeared again, this time

moving toward them slowly, less than a dozen feet above the ground. The *Sphere's* bulging walls plowed through the snow as it swooped down, sending up a great flurry of the fine flakes. Robert caught himself idly likening it to a cannon ball fired into a great bin of flour.

His next recollection was of stumbling up the short flight of metal stairs into the comfortable warmth of the *Sphere's* main chamber, aided by Professor Palmer.

The Martians seemed genuinely concerned over their plight, and offered a confusion of advice. Fortunately, neither Robert nor Taggert had suffered any serious damage from their severe buffeting in the elements and were soon quite comfortable.

Robert, unable to shake off a strange feeling that the princess was in danger, and anxious to return to her in all haste, insisted on operating the *Sphere* again. The big metal ball fairly quivered as he utilized its maximum power to reduce the distance between them and the capital as rapidly as possible.

Exerting the full power of the disk, Robert shot the *Sphere* upward. Suddenly they emerged from the gray twilight of flying flakes into the sunshine. Beneath them the turbulent mists boiled and tumbled as if with anger over the escape of their prey.

A few minutes later Robert checked the *Sphere's* upward flight, darting southward toward the metropolis and his princess at a terrific speed.

Darkness came on quickly after leaving the pole as they passed into the night which had long since enveloped that part of the planet toward which they were headed. Like a cannon ball the *Sphere* roared southward, the dim topography of the planet swaying dizzily below.

Prevailed upon by Robert, the others had decided to snatch some rest after a light repast. But he felt no fatigue in his anxiety to reach the princess.

The sun's edge was peeping over the horizon once more as they neared Svergad. The others woke up and watched their approach interestedly. Soon the spires and domes of the northern metropolis appeared in the distance. A few minutes later they were drifting preparatory to landing.

Suddenly one of the Martians gasped.

"The enemy!" he cried, pointing.

All eyes followed his outstretched arm. Thousands of tents dotted the level plain beyond the city's distant boundary, extending in all directions and partly encircling the city!

19

Upon their arrival in the palace, Robert and his companions found the royal household in an uproar. The emperor's army, vastly superior in numbers and weapons, had already fought its way round two sides of the city and was fast surrounding it. Striking with unexpected promptness, and transported swiftly the greater part of the distance by rail, the advance forces had appeared before the city shortly after the *Sphere's* departure for the pole. Thus did the emperor elect to reply to Hakon's ultimatum. In another day the Svergadians expected to be in a state of absolute siege.

It must not be supposed that the Martians had done away with arms and soldiers, even though they enjoyed one universal government. Rebellions were not unknown, and the central government had its hands full keeping all factions quiet. Emperor Kharnov, himself a usurper, maintained a strong army, ostensibly for policing and preserving order, but in reality to protect himself against the aspirations of his numerous enemies.

With but some seventy hours of food supply within the city boundar-

ies, the situation seemed desperate. So far, Kharnov had made no specific demands, but it was expected that the conditions which he would dictate after encircling the city would hinge upon the possession of Zola.

It was in this hour of impending disaster that Robert had greatness thrust upon him. With implicit confidence in Robert's ability, Hakon begged him to take charge of his forces to resist the invader. Zola's trustful belief in him and her urging decided Robert. He became chief commander of the besieged forces.

Immediately upon his appointment Robert in turn appointed Taggert as his aid and placed Professor Palmer in charge of the palace defenses. His next step was to organize an immediate surprize counter-attack upon the invaders. Though he had not slept in many hours, during which time he had endured much, Robert felt no desire for sleep. The excitement and emergency confronting him buoyed him up for the time. He refused to rest until forced to.

Another hasty ascent in the *Sphere* revealed to them the exact situation. The emperor's main army had pushed northward along the fertile region of one of the two great parallel canals. It had stopped south of the metropolis, sending out smaller contingents in either direction to begin the encircling movement. This movement had already made considerable progress, encountering little resistance in the nearly deserted, small outlying towns whose loyal defenders had all rallied to Hakon's main forces in Svergad. The right spur of the invaders had made the most progress, having succeeded in pushing more than half-way round the metropolis.

It was at this right spur that Robert decided to strike first, in an attempt to take it by surprize, cutting it off from the main army, with the hope of defeating it before the main army could come to its aid. He also planned to launch an attack simultaneously upon the main army in an effort to divert its attention from the spur.

A BRIEF council of war with Hakon and his leaders followed, in which the exact point of attacks were determined upon. Also, orders were wired to all loyal pumping stations situated near the southern edge of the regions loyal to Hakon to shut off the water supply. This would deprive Kharnov's supporters in the region of the equator of all water supplied by ducts leading from the northern polar cap; thus the emperor's armies and his present supporters would soon be confronted with the difficult problem of existing without water in many regions. An ultimatum, demanding the immediate withdrawal of his forces and informing him of the discontinuance of the water supply until his retreat was well under way, was dispatched to Kharnov at once.

A system of signals from the *Sphere* was decided upon. It was agreed that, as a weapon of destruction and direction, the *Sphere* was their most powerful aid. The greatest concern was over the dwindling supply of petrol in its tanks, and the extreme difficulty which Hakon's best chemists were having in obtaining enough of the planet's meager supply of mineral oils to produce any quantity of this fuel. Robert was facing the alternative of either remaining to help defend Zola and her people with the possibility of never being able to return to the Earth, or of returning at once with the now barely sufficient supply of petrol to make the trip. He felt that he owed his companions the chance to decide, though he himself was determined to stand by the princess in any event.

"Old man, I'm with you to the finish. Aren't we all partners in this

adventure anyway?" was Taggert's reply when Robert told him of their quandary.

And Professor Palmer echoed him.

Without further delay the attacks were launched. Lacking any means of observation from above, the invaders were at a disadvantage in spite of their superior numbers. The separation of the spur from the main body was accomplished as planned, and a second body of Hakon's men striking at the head of the column of invaders completed their rout, killing many and taking the rest prisoners.

The arms captured were a welcome acquisition; but the problem of feeding several thousand prisoners was a difficult one. Fortunately, a small food supply train was captured with them. They were immediately put to work throwing up earthworks and conveying heavy equipment about.

One general and several other high officers were captured. A special guard was set over these valuable hostages, for their possession would be of advantage to Hakon when terms came to be considered.

During the attack Robert had directed his forces by means of a simple smoke tube apparatus with which the *Sphere* was equipped, and by means of which long or short puffs of dense black smoke were ejected by manipulation of a plunger. The smoke was produced in a small oven chamber from ignited briquettes.

As the attack progressed perfectly, Robert did not utilize the terrible destructive force of the Norrensen Tube. Owing to the small reserve of petrol and consequently of electric energy depending upon it, he decided to withhold all knowledge of this weapon from their enemies until a particularly opportune time for its use presented itself. The enemy was not so considerate of him, however. Several times projectiles fired by their artillery screamed uncomfortably close past the *Sphere*. Fortunately these had no means of bursting, there being no explosives available on the planet.

The immediate effect of their successful attack upon the invaders was the latters' withdrawal of their left encircling spur, and an evident preparation for a concentrated frontal attack.

Having looked to all important details of preparation to resist such an attack, Robert snatched a few hours of sleep. He lay down with his clothes on, exacting the promise that he would be wakened upon the first signs of an actual attack. Pickets were posted so that the enemy could not approach closer without their knowledge. The *Sphere* had been brought down again and Robert and his companions rested in their quarters within the palace.

It was not till close upon dawn that Robert was aroused by Taggert's shaking him vigorously.

"Hate to do it, Bob," he was saying, as Robert sat up suddenly, "but those Wops are getting ready to raise hell again. Old Kharnov has sent a note of defiance, stating that as he will shortly be in possession of Svergad the temporary shutting off of the water supply doesn't matter."

Robert was on his feet in a moment and was striding through the doorway when he became aware of a hesitant restraining hand upon his arm. He turned to see Zola at his side. She crept into his arms.

"Darling!"

"Ah, my Ro-bert, they would not let me come to you because Zola's love does not matter when everyone is so busy fighting. But I couldn't let you go away again without seeing you."

"Little ghost! You come and go like a dream. How did you get here at this time?"

"Taggert, he helped me. No one else knows but my maid."

"Good old Tag! But now I must hurry, dear, to help fight for you."

"Take me with you, Ro-bert."

"Not now, sweetheart. Stay here in safety till I return, and then you shall go back home with me if you wish."

"And be with you always, my Ro-bert?"

"Always!"

Here Taggert appeared suddenly, as from nowhere.

"Sorry to interrupt your tête-à-tête, people, but we must be getting on."

A hurried leavetaking followed. Zola placed in Robert's hands a small package, which he did not have time to examine then.

A thick haze hung over the dark landscape, which was just visible in the dim starlight. A tense quiet prevailed.

The *Sphere's* stall was reached quickly. All was well, and a few minutes later Robert and Taggert were rising rapidly in it above the sleeping city. The package given Robert by Zola was discovered to contain a small bottle of excellent wine and some *lana*, a nutritious cake, both of which were quite welcome, as he had not eaten anything for several hours.

Rising to a height of about four thousand feet, Robert allowed the *Sphere* to drift slowly over the enemy's lines. With the ports open, the sound of activity below came to them with startling clearness. It was plain that preparations were being made for an attack on the city.

Robert had reduced the speed of the gyrostats to a minimum in order that the invaders might not be aware of its proximity. Every light in the *Sphere* was extinguished. It hung above the busy Martians—a great, dark globe of unsuspected menace.

Suddenly a sharp command rang out below. Immediately there followed a series of flashes accompanied by a corresponding series of dull thuds—sounds of the curious Martian electric artillery in action. Robert's heart sank as he thought of Zola's danger.

With the first thuds of the artillery below and the answering fire from the metropolis, the entire plain seemed fairly to seethe with activity. Bugles were blown, and commands rang out above the other sounds.

Robert switched on the *Sphere's* giant searchlight. A blinding shaft of light shot down upon the broiling mass of humanity beneath. A great cry of consternation was wafted up to them.

"Not exactly elated at our presence," remarked Taggert, dryly.

"We'll be about as welcome as a plague a few minutes from now," remarked Robert.

Swinging the reflector about, he followed every movement of the army of invaders, pausing at intervals to flash instructions to the defenders by a prearranged code of signals corresponding to the smoke signals of the day. Already the enemy was swarming upon the small force of defenders in the outskirts of the metropolis.

Several projectiles sang past the *Sphere*, indicating that the invaders were not going to submit to its presence idly. A number of smaller searchlights were directed upon it from beneath, almost blinding Robert and Taggert as their eyes sought to pierce the darkness below. The invaders were not without defense.

Adopting a swift, staggered course, Robert managed partly to avoid the blinding beams of light. Instructing Taggert to continue these tactics, Robert prepared to use the *Sphere's* powerful weapon, the Norrensen Tube, against their enemies. He prayed only that it would not fail him now, and that their power would hold out long enough.

Calling out to Taggert to steady the *Sphere's* course, Robert carefully aimed the tube into the thickest of the invaders where Taggert played the searchlight's shaft back and forth. Robert pulled the lever releasing the lightning bolt!

A blinding flash, and a rending crash followed! The *Sphere* vibrated like a violin string. Only the goggles which they wore made it possible for Robert and Taggert to look upon the jagged pillar of incandescent flame which spattered upon the plain below with terrific force. So swift and brilliant was its course, that almost ere it had registered upon the retina of their eyes, it was gone, leaving them nearly powerless to see.

When they were again able to see and hear with fair distinctness, they became aware of a great hubbub below. The firing of the artillery had ceased and the attack of the invaders had turned into a rout. Hakon's men were driving them back like sheep!

"God!" ejaculated Taggert, for once jarred out of his habitual sang-froid.

Robert was silent.

A vast pit was visible where the bolt had struck, and the bodies of hundreds of men were strewn round it. The demoralization of that division for the present was complete. The destructive force of the bolt was appalling, but the spectacle it presented had been even more so. The invaders were terrified beyond control by panic fear of this leaping bolt of fire from above.

Robert had no desire to take lives unnecessarily: If the first bolt was sufficient to cause the invaders to retreat or to cease fighting, he determined not to release a second one. He studied closely the movements of the armies. As if afraid to antagonize the *Sphere* further, the invaders had ceased to play the beams of their searchlights upon it.

In the east the first faint flush of dawn was visible. Already the tall spires of the metropolis were touched with coral.

Robert became aware that the *Sphere* had settled too close to the ground for safety in case of further firing from the hostile artillery.

"Better raise her another thousand, Taggert," he called, turning to the latter, who was operating the machinery.

"Just what I was trying to do, old man, but she doesn't respond."

A swift examination proved Robert's fears—that their reserve of power had been virtually exhausted by the tube! The speed of the gyrostats was perceptibly slackening. The *Sphere* was sinking!

Feverishly they turned to the engine which drove the dynamo. With this running, enough current soon would be generated to lift the *Sphere* out of danger. It was then that the extent of their calamity was discovered. The engine stubbornly refused to start, for one of those mysterious reasons to which engines are addicted. It persistently defied their combined efforts to diagnose the trouble.

In order to avoid crashing upon the plain, now less than a thousand feet below, Robert swung the disk upright and opened the shutters from its entire face. Even with its weakened power, unaided by the dying current, it would be almost sufficient to balance the *Sphere's* weight, as long as the gyrostats were turning slowly. Thus the crash might be averted, but at the same time it was impossible to utilize any side pull of the disk to carry them beyond the enemy's lines. They were facing capture—perhaps death!

Finding that each was in the other's way, Taggert, who had a knowledge of engines, continued to tinker with it while Robert looked on from

a window, where he kept an eye also on the plain below.

The *Sphere* continued to settle slowly, though they knew not what moment the gyrostats might stop, allowing them to crash down upon the plain. With each hundred feet of descent their hope grew stronger; but that they would fall into the enemy's hands was now inevitable, for they were sinking into the very center of the camp.

Off to the south the sounds of fighting had ceased. Stretcher bearers were bringing in the wounded from that direction. Robert wondered dully how long it would be before he and Taggert would fall into the hands of the invaders.

Curiously enough, the Martians below were equally perturbed at the approach of the *Sphere*. Having witnessed its terrible destructive power, they felt absolutely at its mercy, and feared even to train a gun on it for fear that they would be wiped out immediately in retaliation. So far they did not suspect that the *Sphere* was not descending at the will of its occupants.

Realization of this occurred to Robert.

"Maybe we can bluff it through, Tag," he said, hopefully. "It's our only chance."

By this time the *Sphere* had settled to within a bare fifty yards of the ground. Its buoyancy was now virtually the same as the slightly denser atmosphere at this height. It drifted slowly for several minutes, the gyrostats continuing to revolve softly.

The Martians had crowded round in a generous circle below. Mingled fear and curiosity were written upon their upturned faces, which could be seen quite clearly in the rapidly brightening daylight. A pompous officer pushed forward into the open space directly beneath the *Sphere*. Robert leaned out and addressed this individual.

"As emissaries of his excellency, the Governor of Svergad, I demand the immediate withdrawal of these forces," Robert began, affecting a confidence which he was far from feeling.

"Fine. Go to it, boy!" encouraged Taggert in a hoarse whisper.

The officer did not seem surprized at Robert's demand. But, unfortunately, in spite of his pompous manner, it appeared that he was not of sufficiently high rank to treat with so important a matter. Every moment was precious, for at any instant the *Sphere* might betray their weakness by settling to the ground.

The officer politely stated that their demand would be referred at once to the generalissimo. Realizing the importance of satisfactorily completing negotiations before the *Sphere* descended, Robert decided to take a bold stand.

"The generalissimo will not do. I must speak with the emperor quickly —here."

As expected, the officer was visibly taken aback. Several valuable, fleeting seconds passed before he recovered from his surprize and indecision.

"Your request will be communicated to the emperor at once through the generalissimo," he answered presently.

The minutes seemed like hours as Robert and Taggert anxiously awaited the reappearance of the official. Meanwhile the *Sphere* very slowly settled lower and lower. Taggert's efforts to start the engine had availed nothing. They could but wait idly with what patience they could summon. To have attempted utilizing part of the disk's power to carry them beyond the enemy's lines would but have resulted in disaster, for their present buoyancy was maintained only with the aid of the disk's

power (directed absolutely perpendicularly).

A small group moving toward them heralding the probable approach of the emperor or generalissimo revived hope in their breasts. They might yet maintain their strategic position long enough to drive home a bargain that the Martians would honor when they were obliged to descend and attempt to bluff their way through a difficult situation somehow.

"The old boy himself," ejaculated Taggert as the group drew near.

Robert recognized the emperor in a car pulling up below. Seated opposite him was the officer to whom they had first talked, while beside the emperor was a much decorated and bedecked individual who he hoped was the generalissimo himself.

The latter stepped out of the car after the officer, and assisted the emperor to alight. The three of them slowly paced beneath the *Sphere* as it drifted lightly with the soft morning breeze. The emperor was plainly angered and making a poor attempt to conceal the fact.

"What means this rude summons which his Highness, the emperor, has chosen to humor?" said the generalissimo; for that this *was* the generalissimo they quickly discovered. His voice carried up to them clearly. Barely thirty feet separated them now.

"I will speak directly with the emperor himself," Robert began. "As emissary of his Highness, the Governor of Svergad, I demand the immediate withdrawal of all forces from this region. Unless such a movement is begun without delay, we are prepared to wipe out your entire army by means of the terrible weapon which you have seen."

The emperor raised a countenance dark with passion. The generalissimo checked him with a nervous grip on his arm as he was about to speak, addressing him earnestly in an undertone.

The emperor calmed himself with evident effort.

"You have the advantage of us," he said. "Therefore, my armies will retire at once; but I warn you that you shall be conquered in the end and be made to suffer for this."

"Very well, your Highness. I suggest that you give orders immediately for their retirement as, unless it is commenced within a few minutes, I shall resume their destruction."

Again the generalissimo was obliged to restrain the emperor's burst of passion. A moment later, at a curt nod of assert from the emperor, the generalissimo dispatched the officer with a command to begin an immediate general retirement of all forces.

The first contingent was soon moving northward. The emperor and generalissimo had departed ominously for their headquarters. The *Sphere* continued to drift idly, settling ever closer to the ground. The enemy forces still stretched more than a mile between the *Sphere* and the city. How Robert and Taggert yearned for a stiffening of the breeze that they might be swept safely beyond the enemy's lines before the descending *Sphere* placed them in their power! Even now soldiers below paused in their preparations for retreat to gaze up at them curiously, albeit anxiously, evidently wondering why the *Sphere* hovered so low. Should the true reason be guessed, their temporary victory would be lost.

The next ten minutes seemed like an eternity to Robert. It had brought them only a little nearer the city and their friends, while scarcely thirty feet separated them from the enemy. Some of the troops were already marching off toward the south beneath them, but it was a physical impossibility for the thousands still be-

tween the *Sphere* and its goal to move out of the way in less than half an hour. And half an hour spelled almost certain disaster for the *Sphere*.

"Looks as if we'll have to indulge in a little more diplomacy," Robert remarked.

"Drop in upon his Royal Highness to bid him goo'bye, so to speak," said Taggert.

"Something like that."

At this moment the suspense was broken by a sudden lurch of the *Sphere*. The gyrostats had stopped!

With but the disk's diminished power to break its fall, the *Sphere* dropped into the sand with a jarring thud.

The Martians had carefully avoided the section beneath the *Sphere*. Consequently it fell clear. For several minutes they kept their distance. It was evident that they all feared this mysterious machine greatly.

Presently a pompous officer strode into the space about the *Sphere*. Clearly he saw in the situation great possibilities for his own future and he intended making the most of it. Yet, like the rest, he was not certain that the *Sphere* was as helpless as it seemed. Before he had given an order, Robert stepped out of the *Sphere*.

Robert interrupted the officer as he was about to speak.

"I come to give warning that unless the retirement of all the emperor's forces is accomplished more rapidly, I will resume their destruction," he said, imperiously.

The Martian was visibly undecided. Perhaps he and his regiment would be wiped out if he attempted to hold the *Sphere*. He observed Taggert glaring at him balefully from a window. Nevertheless he was a brave man, especially when he thought of the brilliant future he might enjoy if he got away with this. A disagreeable smile disfigured his sharp-featured countenance.

"I think the emperor will soon have changed his mind about the retirement—just as soon as he knows that you have honored him by landing within his lines."

"The emperor is too wise a man to delay the withdrawal of these troops," answered Robert, "for even at this moment, should I choose, every man in sight would be blasted into atoms at a signal from me!"

The cocky officer's assurance again was visibly shaken. Neither knowing that the death-dealing Norrensen shaft was rendered useless on account of its outlet being buried in the sand, nor being certain that the *Sphere's* power was exhausted, he must have feared instant annihilation if he persisted. A cunning light came into his eyes suddenly, and was as quickly veiled. Affecting a friendly attitude he strode over to within a couple feet of Robert. To have backed away from him would but have advertised their weakness, and any retreat from the circle about them was impossible. So he stood his ground and waited the officer's next move.

As if about to take Robert into his confidence, he placed his hand upon Robert's shoulder. Then like a flash he rapped out a command, at the same instant covering Robert with his *lahan*, the Martian electric automatic.

Immediately the ring of Martians closed in upon the *Sphere*, while the officer's two aids hurried to his help. Counting on his immunity from a possible blast from the *Sphere* while in close proximity to Robert, the crafty officer had dared to defy the *Sphere*. But he had not counted upon his prisoner's hot-headedness.

Even as he whipped out the *lahan*, Robert started a slashing uppercut to his head. Before the surprized officer could fire or dodge, the blow caught him on the point of his jaw

with a beautiful precision. He staggered and fell just before his anxious aids could reach him. Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, Robert could not repress a laugh over the comical appearance of the little, pointed red beard on his late opponent's chin, which was tilted serenely skyward, as he sprawled on his pompous back.

A few minutes later Robert was securely bound and led roughly away. His last glimpse of the *Sphere* showed him a ring of shouting Martians round it, but no sign of Taggert.

20

ROBERT was taken to a large tent near by, where, without ceremony, he was securely fastened to the large center pole by means of chain and anklet like a criminal. Two armed guards were set to watch him, after having searched him and taken away the automatic with which he had been armed when he left the *Sphere*.

At noon a plate of coarse food was brought to him, and a cup of water. He found the food palatable and, being hungry despite the gloomy outlook, ate all of it. His guards stared at him intently all the while, evidently regarding the eating of an Earth-being as a great curiosity.

The chain, a stout-linked affair which would have weighed heavily had he been on the Earth, allowed Robert little freedom of movement. The wooden stool which he had been furnished affording no rest for his back, soon grew dreadfully tiresome. He tried every position he could conceive for relief, each of which his guards regarded with fresh suspicion. Once he tried to engage them in conversation, but he succeeded only in drawing grunts and uneasy stares from them.

Sounds of activities without drifted to him. There seemed to be considerable movement of troops past the tent, all in one direction. Although he was not certain in which direction Svergad lay, Robert knew that they were in all probability moving back to the attack, now that the menace of the *Sphere* was removed. He wondered dully what had happened to Taggert.

He was just shifting his position for about the fifty-first time when the flap of the tent was raised and the pompous officer of the morning's encounter stepped in, followed by two fellow officers. The guards came to attention stiffly.

The pompous officer scowled ominously. Plainly he intended dealing with Robert as severely as possible. He strode over to him.

"Well, how does it feel to be in chains, my vicious friend?" he rasped.

"Quite all right, you old toad," Robert answered pleasantly in English.

"What?"

"I said, 'Quite comfortable, old chap,' " said Robert, this time in the Martian tongue, interestedly surveying a discolored lump on his captor's right jaw where he had landed his fist that morning.

The officer's face went dark with passion. He raised his cane as if to strike Robert. Before he could do so, however, Robert jerked up his stool to protect himself. Simultaneously the two guards sprang forward to protect their superior. But the latter's courage failed him at the menace of the stool and he let his hand with the cane fall to his side. He contented himself for the time with a murderous look at Robert, who put the chair down, but remained standing for greater freedom of action. The guards fell back, visibly relieved.

"You shall be handled later, sir," barked the officer. "Meanwhile, do you know the fate in store for your friends?"

"The privilege of beating hell out of your rotten army," Robert shot back at him. He could have sworn that he saw a brief flicker of amusement in one of the other officer's eyes as he said this.

Once more the angry officer seemed on the verge of striking Robert, but his eyes fastened upon the stool and he changed his mind. He controlled himself with an effort.

"Another day and you will change your song," he managed to sputter. "Until then *you* will have the 'privilege' of reflecting here in comfort, while a suitable punishment is devised to repay you for your destruction of our men!"

With that he turned and stamped out of the tent, followed by the other officers.

The two guards viewed Robert with evident awe after this interview. Clearly they were unused to hearing their high officers abused so roundly and carelessly. Perhaps they were saying to themselves something to the effect that this Earth-being must be *some* guy.

Their one-cylinder brains were further startled here by Robert's tumbling the dreaded stool over, preparatory to reclining upon the sandy floor. They exchanged glances uneasily. One of them started as if to object, then seemed to think better of it, relapsing again into a stupid dumbness.

The afternoon sun was well down in the sky when the curious sound of distant firing of the Martians' *hilwai* came to Robert's ears—the first he had heard since his capture. His heart sank as he considered the probable result of the bitter struggle which it heralded. If only that confounded engine had not failed them at the critical moment!

The sounds of battle continued until after sunset, when his guards were relieved by two others whose intelligence and curiosity appeared to be about on a par with those of the first two. One of them possessed a rather remarkable, rudderlike nose which fascinated and diverted Robert for a time, to its owner's evident discomfiture.

Somehow Robert managed to pass the night in troubled dozing on his hard bed of sand, tormented by anxious thoughts of Zola. He welcomed the first flush of dawn with thanksgiving, despite his weariness. The sound of firing was resumed about this time.

SHORTLY after his breakfast Robert was visited by Kharnov.

The ruler's crafty features were disfigured with a scowl. He entered the tent alone, commanding his escort to remain outside.

"You have returned hostility for hospitality, and the penalty shall be death," he said.

His tones fell with deadly precision, like the pronouncement of a sentence by a criminal judge. An involuntary chill swept over Robert in spite of his effort to appear unmoved.

"I was but protecting a helpless girl from your unwelcome attentions," he replied, ashamed that he could control the nervousness in his voice only by a great effort. "That you have chosen to pursue her with an army to be resisted is your own folly."

"I am not here to discuss fine points with you, sir," returned the emperor sharply, "but to offer you a means of saving your life. You shifted your loyalty once; you can do it again. Aid my army with the *Sphere* and you may return to your planet in peace. Refuse and suffer the consequences!"

"My loyalty was and is only to the right," retorted Robert. "Your proposition doesn't interest me."

He almost forgot his personal fear as he realized with a thrill that Khar-

nov's latest attack must have been successfully repulsed or he would not have made this offer.

"Beware! I am offering you your life."

"I don't care to buy it at that price."

The emperor was patently more perplexed than angered by Robert's rejection of his terms. His code did not permit of an understanding of anyone's refusal of life for principle. He was concerned merely in deciding just what concession it was necessary to hold out to Robert in order to secure his acquiescence. A crafty thought occurred to him.

"You will also be given as many of the diamonds, so highly valued on your planet, as you can take with you. Does that interest you? Of course, I should require that two or three of my men accompany you while you were operating against the government's enemies."

An inspiration came to Robert. Once he got the *Sphere* in midair again—three or a dozen Martians—he might frighten them into submission and land within the city. It was worth trying anyway, and, if it failed, they could but take his life, which it seemed certain he would lose anyway if he flatly refused the emperor's demand.

"You have the advantage of me," he said finally. "I accept your terms. But my friend must accompany me to assist in the operation of the *Sphere*."

"One of my men will assist you after you have instructed him. Your friend must remain a hostage till you have carried out your part of the contract. No harm shall come to him unless you fail."

This put the matter in a different light. Here was an obstacle that would require real diplomacy to hurdle.

"I fear your man can not learn quickly enough, but I'll try to teach him," said Robert, hoping to find some solution later. "However, the *Sphere* can not be operated until I have discovered and corrected some defect in its machinery."

"Ah, so that explains your strange landing."

"Exactly."

Kharnov pondered a moment.

"Very well," he resumed. "I shall select the men to accompany you and return later. Meanwhile I will see that you are made more comfortable here."

A sinister smile played over his face as he turned to go, giving Robert a feeling of unknown, impending evil.

True to Kharnov's promise, however, the tent promptly was equipped with various comforts, including a couch, table and chair, and other welcome additions. Good food and excellent wines also were brought him.

The soft couch and soothing wine, after his night of sleeplessness, produced a pleasant drowziness which Robert found difficult to resist. He slept, and it was dusk when he awoke.

The distant sounds of battle had ceased again. Dinner was brought to him and two hours passed without further word from Kharnov. Once more drowziness overtook Robert and he dozed. His two guards, who had so far watched him with eyes of hawks, relaxed their vigilance somewhat. They envied him his privilege of sleeping.

"Brother," said Rudderbeak, finally, "it is not necessary that two of us watch over this sleeper. Let us decide by chance which of us may rest also."

"Words of wisdom, indeed. Let us do so by all means."

Fate decided against Rudderbeak. The pebble which he cast at the line drawn on the sand in the tent rolled a trifle too far. So, grumblingly, he

took up the long night watch while his companion stretched out upon the floor with a sigh of contentment. He was to be warned in ample time at the approach of anyone.

Here fate again took a hand. Rudderbeak found standing too great an effort with two peacefully slumbering beings before him. He felt that he was at least entitled to the luxury of sitting down. So he availed himself of the comfortable chair so lately brought in for their captive.

The chair creaked as he settled his weight in it. Had it not been for this, another sound just outside the tent might have attracted his attention. Even as he stretched his long legs in extravagant comfort a shadow without flattened itself upon the ground.

A little while after that Robert woke abruptly to see a face within a few inches of his. The lantern suspended in the tent top cast weird shadows around the enclosure, giving the features of the countenance above his a horrible aspect. An involuntary cry arose in his throat, but was suddenly checked. For there was a strange familiarity about the glint of red in the intruder's hair! The shadow-blurred features quickly lost their ferocity. It was Taggert.

Their hands met in a clasp of glad reunion. No word passed between them as Taggert proceeded to examine the length of chain with which Robert was fastened. He shook his head as he saw the heavy links.

Robert saw his mouth straighten into a firm, hard line as he stared at the sleeping guards. He removed the gun from the side of the sitting guard. Then, drawing an object from his pocket, he walked over to where Rudderbeak lay. He hesitated.

"Got to be done," he muttered. Raising his arm he brought the object down upon the slumbering guard's head forcibly. The Martian slumped deeper into his chair. His gun slipped to the sand. Stooping quickly, Taggert picked up the fallen gun, retaining it and handing Robert his automatic. The other guard, stretched upon the ground, had not stirred yet.

Deftly Taggert searched the stunned guard. But the key he was looking for was not in the Martian's possession. He turned his attention to the other guard, who still slumbered. As Taggert meditated, the sleeping guard stirred uneasily. In spite of the reporter's efforts to avoid noise the disturbance had evidently been sufficient to break into the sleeping guard's subconscious mind. He opened his eyes suddenly, looking directly at Taggert.

Before the Martian could gather his senses, however, Taggert pressed the *lahan* against his chest.

"Not a sound!" he commanded in the Martian tongue. "Now give me the key to this anklet—quick."

The Martian was wide awake enough to realize his helplessness. He promptly pulled the desired key out of his pocket and handed it to Taggert.

Robert covered the Martian with the automatic while Taggert fitted the key to the anklet. A moment later he was free.

They were now faced by the problem of binding and gagging the conscious Martian. No rope was available within the tent.

"His shirt," suggested Robert, following his inspiration by pulling the garment off the now completely cowed Martian.

Swiftly they bound, gagged and blindfolded him, the twisted arms of the shirt making fair substitutes for cord, though there was not enough to bind him as thoroughly as they wished. They locked the anklet upon him after shortening the chain by twisting and knotting it round the big center-pole. The unconscious Martian they left as he was.

Warning the bound Martian with dire threats, they slipped out of the tent into the night.

Had Phobus been shining then they would surely have been seen at once; but the little Martian moon had set an hour past. Creeping painfully past the clustered tents they came at last to the edge of the camp, which, fortunately, was not a great distance away.

Here it was necessary for them to pass the pickets. The brilliant starlight and level, open desert made their escape extremely difficult. How far apart the pickets were stationed they did not know, but one paced slowly across a stretch just ahead of where they lay partly concealed in a slight depression or wave in the desert's floor.

Cautiously they wormed forward to another shallow depression while the near-by sentry's back was turned. Here they waited anxiously as he paced back and again turned away. One thing in their favor for the present was that the sentry directed his attention chiefly in the opposite direction, toward the city. That would become their disadvantage, however, when once they succeeded in getting past the sentries and between them and the city.

No sooner had the sentry turned his back again than they were scrambling feverishly toward a distant, faint strip of shadow, which indicated their next scanty haven of temporary safety. Their arms and knees were weary to the point of exhaustion; but they pressed on desperately. Still the little line of shadow ahead seemed far away. Would they make it before the sentry turned and discovered them? Surely he would notice the track where they had pawed their way through the loose sand.

How they finally reached their goal neither could remember. It seemed that they had crawled and crawled for eternity—a sort of dreadful nightmare in which their limbs moved unwillingly while they remained in the same spot. Both were exhausted when they slid stiffly into the scanty haven of the little dip in the sand. For the moment they cared not whether they were captured or not. They longed only to lie panting till their parched throats had cooled.

When they dared peep at the picket he had started serenely back on his walk away from them again. He had noticed neither them nor their tracks! With revived courage and strength they resumed the grilling struggle toward safety. Once more they reached a welcoming shadow without discovery.

"Boy, howdy!" gasped Taggert. "When do we—quit this caterpillar glide?"

"If our luck—holds, we'll—soon be beyond—the danger zone," puffed Robert, resting on the flat of his back.

TAGGERT'S escape and the fate of the *Sphere* were still puzzling Robert, as they had not yet had an opportunity to mention these things. At Robert's query now Taggert enlightened him briefly.

"When I saw them overpower you and lead you away," he recounted, "I realized that I could help most by holding the *Sphere*, and coming to your assistance later if I succeeded. So I drew the manhole trap to and waited for developments. Peeping cautiously, I was fortunate in being able to spot the tent they took you to.

"Well, they howled round the outside for a while, but made no attempt to break in. I suppose they feared to tamper with the *Sphere* after its exhibition of its destructive powers. Finally they withdrew at a command from an officer. Still I was careful not to show myself. I tinkered with

the engine some more, quietly, but without results.

"Finally darkness came on. The Martians were camped about the *Sphere* but all seemed anxious to give it a wide berth, for the nearest were a hundred paces or more away. They were scattered pretty well, so I took a long chance and slipped out into the darkness, snapping the trap-door shut. Luck was with me. You know the rest."

"But man, you were banking on a chance in a thousand of getting through!"

"Oh, chances. Like kisses, they are to be taken."

They both laughed a little at this, and it lightened their spirits. The situation did not seem so hopeless after all.

"Then the *Sphere* is still unharmed," mused Robert.

"Not only unharmed but not far from us right now. Look over there."

Robert looked off to their right as indicated by Taggart. A familiar dark shape reared itself above the level of the desert, probably a quarter of a mile distant. He breathed a sigh of relief. Though useless to them just then it relieved him to know that the Martians had not wrecked it.

The still glare of the stars piercing the narrow Martian belt of clear atmosphere shone coldly upon them.

Robert wondered which of them was the good old Earth. Ah, to be safely back there again!—the professor, Taggert—and Zola. Would they all see each other again? Could he expect Zola to give up her father and other kin, her friends—everything she had learned to love in her own world? She had said she would go with him. Would her decision withstand the final parting from pleading friends and kinsmen, even if her father would let her go? Would she be happy on his Earth, if he succeeded in rescuing her from her present peril? Could he honestly urge her to leave with him?

These questions raced through his mind as his strength surged back to him. There was but one answer: if they could get away he would take her with him if he could possibly get her to go willingly. That he could make her happy he felt certain, for he would devote his entire life to doing so.

He became aware of Taggert's prodding him vigorously in the ribs.

"'Can' the star-gazing, old dear. It's time we were wriggling merrily on our way," he whispered.

They bestirred themselves reluctantly from the latent warmth of the sand. Waiting until the picket was once more on his way from them, they staggered to their feet and made a dash of it.

When they had traversed perhaps three quarters of a mile they slackened their pace to a walk. About two miles ahead of them lay the city's outskirts.

Approaching the lines of the city's defense they faced a danger similar to that from which they had just escaped. They might be mistaken for foes and fired upon when discovered.

Discovery came sooner than they expected. A Svergadian picket popped up suddenly from a pit dug in the sand and challenged them sharply, training his gun the while upon Robert, who was in the lead.

Robert explained who they were and asked permission to go to Hakon. The sentry seemed dubious but finally summoned an officer, who heard their story and promptly promised to have them escorted into Hakon's presence.

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THEIR escort was dismissed upon their arrival at Hakon's quarters, by his aid, who recognized Robert and Taggert at once.

"The governor will see you at once, I'm sure," he told them. They waited in a small, sumptuously furnished anteroom, while he went to summon Hakon.

A few minutes later Hakon stepped into the room. He wore a long, loose garment which he had thrown over his sleeping clothes. His face was pitifully haggard. He seemed to have aged terribly since they had seen him last. A faint, sad smile softened his features as his eyes fell upon them.

"Ah, my young friends, I am glad to see you safely back and out of the enemy's clutches. First, I want to thank you with my whole heart for the timely aid of the *Sphere*, which really turned the tide of the battle in our favor at a most critical time. Now I am grieved to hear that, through no fault of yours, it has fallen into the hands of the enemy. But, I, too, have a sorrow. My beloved daughter has been tricked into captivity."

"A captive!" gasped Robert, clutching at his heart. His Zola a prisoner of that ogre, Kharnov!

"Here is an ultimatum just received from the beast," resumed Hakon, dully, handing Robert a folded document.

Robert unfolded the paper.

"Your daughter will come to no harm provided you capitulate by noon tomorrow," it read in effect.

"The dog!" cried Robert. "How did he contrive to get her into his possession?"

"This was found in her room," said Hakon, handing him a small crumpled piece of paper.

To his surprize it had his name at the bottom, although it was written in Martian. Zola did not understand his own tongue. On the paper was written: "I am a prisoner. Unless you come to intercede for me with the emperor, I shall be put to death at dawn. Robert."

Surely love is blind! Else she would have known that he could not have written such a wantonly selfish plea.

"This is a false message, of course," said Robert, wondering whether Hakon believed him the author of such a note.

"I know it, my boy."

"We must strike quickly," said Robert. "Let me lead an attack at once. Nothing short of a complete routing of their entire army will satisfy me."

Hakon smiled at his fierce enthusiasm.

"Even now an attack on a tremendous scale is organized," he said. "It will take place just before dawn at a signal to be given all divisions simultaneously. You may direct the center."

"Say, where do I come in?" broke in Taggert.

"Come along with me, old man. We'll scrap together."

"Fair enough. We'll knock his Nib's royal block off."

Sleep that night was out of the question. As dawn approached, Robert absorbed the details of the gigantic offensive at a conference with several of the leaders. Everyone was on the alert. The governor's daughter was a great favorite and greatly admired for her character and beauty. Every man knew of her danger and, with such an incentive to success, they would be all but invincible.

When finally the signal for the general advance came over the wires, the big army started forward in three giant columns, cautiously at first until their attack should have been observed. The absence of aircraft—because of the thin Martian atmosphere which made them impracticable—made it possible for them to make considerable progress before the enemy was aware of their supposed victims' offensive.

It was agreed that upon the discovery of the advance of any column, that column would at once fire a rocket as the signal for a general rush upon the enemy from all points.

ROBERT'S column had advanced unobserved well over half-way to the enemy's lines. Suddenly a rocket flashed heavenward from the right column. His men needed not Robert's shouted command as they dashed madly after him toward the startled enemy less than a mile ahead.

With the rapid pace made possible on Mars by the weak gravity, they covered the intervening distance in about two minutes.

The dull drumming of the enemy's awakened fire was punctuated by occasional thuds near by as their bullets found marks in the onrushing column.

The Svergadians met a brief check as they encountered the outpost. Then onward they swept like a great wave upon the dismayed besiegers.

The growing flush in the east bathed the battlefield in pale rose, touched here and there with purple dusk. Overhead the fading stars twinkled faintly as if shrinking from this scene of wicked strife.

In spite of their surprize the enemy rallied to a stiff defense. They had the advantage of greatly superior numbers, and knew it. And Robert's column had charged directly into the main body of their forces.

The morale of few armies, however, could have withstood the fanaticism with which the Svergadians charged that morning. Their long, slender bayonets flashed viciously as they plunged forward fearlessly again and again. Every man was fighting to avenge his princess, whom the leader of these men had abducted. The enemy was dismayed. They were given no time to rally. Surely these were fiends who attacked them with no care for their own lives! Dismay became consternation—rout!

In vain did the enemy's officers struggle to stem the mad retreat. The front ranks turned in panic from the vicious line of steel, and stampeded over the troops supporting them.

Side by side fought Robert and Taggert. Long since, they had emptied their automatics. Armed with bayonet guns picked up from fallen Martians, they charged blindly with the rest. That they both continued unwounded in the foremost ranks was a miracle.

But the goddess of chance is a capricious deity. She selected a moment of comparative safety to strike. It came as Robert and Taggert were vigorously following up the rout.

"Keep them on the run, men," shouted Robert, turning and setting the example.

As he sprang forward, a thud at his right caused him to turn sharply. He was just in time to catch Taggert as he swayed and pitched forward!

"Where is it, Tag, old man?" he sobbed.

A crooked smile struggled to the reporter's livid lips. He fumbled at the right side of his breast. A fleck of bright-colored foam showed on his lips as they moved feebly. Robert stooped close to listen.

"Running like—hell, ain't they—Bob?"

"Like hell," Robert assured him, choking.

Feverishly he ripped open Taggert's shirt to reach the wound, but the latter restrained him with his last remnant of strength.

"No use, Bob. I'm—done. Please listen—closer. That's better. Take papers—inside coat pocket—send them—*The Chronicle*—'f you get back. Let money go—to Mother. Picture here. Tell her—and Sarah—good-bye."

His body went limp. The last word was barely audible. His gallant spirit had flown.

Robert let Taggert's body down reverently. Poor, happy-go-lucky fellow! Three weeks ago he had been a stranger, a stowaway, an outsider prying into their affairs. Now he seemed like a lifelong acquaintance—a brother!

The swift tide of battle had swept on ahead. Near by a large, officers' tent reared high its peak. Strangely it had survived the fierce struggle, which, but a few minutes before, had raged round it. To this tent Robert carried Taggert's body, and placed it softly upon a cot inside. Choking back a lump in his throat, he drew a cover up over the cot and turned away. A bright blue sash caught his eye—one of the rare, brilliant-hued bits of apparel which only the most well-to-do Martians can afford because of the scarcity of minerals for dyes. This he tied conspicuously on the outside of the tent to identify it.

With these precautions for later recovery of Taggert's body, Robert dashed on after the receding line of battle. So hot was the chase and so overwhelming the enemy's rout, that he had difficulty in gaining the front again.

Once more in the front rank he fought furiously, for to his original grievance was now added that of the death of a pal. The resistance of the enemy's center was completely broken. Its officers no longer had any control over it. Whole companies surrendered rather than be slaughtered.

Suddenly, however, the headlong retreat of the enemy was checked. Those in the rear still scattered in consternation, or abjectly surrendered, but ahead there was a confusion and congestion—some obstacle against which the retreat floundered, swirled—and finally rallied.

Once more Robert found himself in the thick of the fray. Somehow, unaccountably, the enemy's retreat had been halted. Those in contact with what had been the rear of the retreat, were now actually on the aggressive, fighting like rats, with their backs to a wall.

Goaded by the thought of Zola's danger, Robert fought furiously. His gun he had discarded in lieu of a saber, which he now wielded with terrible destruction. His strength, superior to that of the slightly smaller-statured Martians, was augmented by his passion to destroy, to kill, until he should reach the very heart of this resistance which was keeping him from *her*. His very fierceness was a protection, his whirlwind attack striking terror into the hearts of the opposing Martians near him. His followers, too, inspired by his example, fought with great vigor. Like the head of a wedge they hewed their way steadily into the enemy's ranks.

Once more their opponents were routed. Like chaff they were swept back, leaving but the core of their temporary resistance—a small knot of picked men round whom they rallied briefly though bravely.

Against this group Robert charged with his followers.

A terrific struggle ensued. By their uniforms Robert knew the stubborn group to be the emperor's picked guardsmen. His heart leaped with fierce exultation as he realized that he was probably about to face the crafty, deceitful ruler.

It was at this juncture that Kharnov himself appeared suddenly from out a sumptuous tent!

In a belated effort he attempted to rally his remaining guards in a futile counter attack. By an almost superhuman effort Robert fought his way through the ring of defenders to the false emperor. A blaze of intense hatred leaped into the latter's eyes

as he recognized his former captive. Eagerly he sprang forward to meet him.

Because of his unusual stature among his own people, Kharnov was an equal match for Robert. In skill, with the saber, he was Robert's superior. Both men were fired by an intense passion, but Robert's wrath had the advantage of a righteous cause.

Warily they circled each other, the tempered blades clashing as they parried each other's vicious thrusts. In their furious aggressiveness, both men were quickly wounded, though lightly, several times. Their shuffling feet thrashed the loose sand into spume as they circled each other swiftly. Their breath whistled hoarsely in their throats as they lurched back and forth, each eager to cut the other down.

As their first fierce vigor became dulled somewhat by their terrific exertions, both men settled down to deliberate, crafty fighting, each keenly watching for an opening which might prove fatal to the other.

Robert was handicaped by his unfamiliarity with the saber. Fortunately he was a skilled fencer. Only his skill with the foils enabled him to parry the slashing attacks of his opponent.

His eluding of Kharnov's furious attacks only enraged the latter the more. He was overtaxing his endurance. It began to dawn upon Robert that, if he could successfully withstand Kharnov's attacks a little longer, he would soon have a big advantage over the berserk ruler.

His opportunity came unexpectedly. Missing his footing, he all but lost his balance. Quick to take advantage of his misfortune, Kharnov launched a terrific blow at him. Had it struck home it must surely have rent Robert in twain! Fortunately, however, it missed him—but narrowly. The tip of the razorlike blade whined through the air but a fraction of an inch from Robert's throat.

The delivery of this terrific swing momentarily unbalanced Kharnov. Recovering at this moment, Robert lunged swiftly. Precipitated upon the blade partly by the unchecked force of his wild swing, Kharnov was mortally wounded, the broad blade piercing his breast deeply. With a dreadful oath he dropped to the sand.

Robert quickly knelt at the emperor's side to render assistance. But it was clear to him at the first glance that the unfortunate man was done.

With a supreme effort Kharnov raised himself upon his elbow. His lips twitched as he tried to speak. Then suddenly he slumped back lifeless upon the sand.

Having convinced himself that the hapless man was beyond need of aid, Robert looked to his own wounds. The battle line had swept far ahead during their private struggle. He found himself unmolested and unaided.

His cheek was bleeding profusely, but the wound proved to be superficial. The cloth of his coat, too, was wet from a wound in his arm which pained him cruelly. An attempt to remove this garment resulted in a twinge of pain almost unbearable. He swayed faintly, gritting his teeth in an effort to retain his senses.

Once more he tried to take off his coat. His head swam. Then everything went black before his eyes.

Did the Sphere's occupants get back to Earth? Read the thrilling concluding chapters next month.

The Tomb

by H. P. Lovecraft

"Red tongues of flame and searing gusts of heat engulfed the house."

Sedibus ut saltem placidis in morte quiescam.—*Virgil.*

IN RELATING the circumstances which have led to my confinement within this refuge for the demented, I am aware that my present position will create a natural doubt of the authenticity of my narrative. It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is too limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and intelligence those isolated phenomena, seen and felt only by a psychologically sensitive few, which lie outside its common experience. Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them; but the prosaic materialism of the majority condemns as madness the flashes of supersight which penetrate the common veil of obvious empiricism.

My name is Jervas Dudley, and from earliest childhood I have been a dreamer and a visionary. Wealthy beyond the necessity of a commercial life, and temperamentally unfitted for the formal studies and social recreations of my acquaintances, I have dwelt ever in realms apart from the visible world; spending my youth and adolescence in ancient and little known books, and in roaming the fields and groves of the region near my ancestral home. I do not think that what I read in these books or saw in these fields and groves was exactly what other boys read and saw there; but of this I must say little, since detailed speech would but confirm those cruel slanders upon my intellect which I sometimes overhear from the whispers of the stealthy attendants around me. It is sufficient for me to relate events without analyzing causes.

I have said that I dwelt apart from the visible world, but I have not said that I dwelt alone. This no human creature may do; for lacking the fellowship of the living, he inevitably draws upon the companionship of things that are not, or are no longer, living. Close by my home there lies a singular wooded hollow, in whose twilight deeps I spent most of my time; reading, thinking, and dreaming. Down its moss-covered slopes my first steps of infancy were taken, and around its grotesquely gnarled oak trees my first fancies of boyhood were woven. Well did I come to know the presiding dryads of those trees, and often have I watched their wild

dances in the struggling beams of a waning moon—but of these things I must not now speak. I will tell only of the lone tomb in the darkest of the hillside thickets; the deserted tomb of the Hydes, an old and exalted family whose last direct descendant had been laid within its black recesses many decades before my birth.

The vault to which I refer is of ancient granite, weathered and discolored by the mists and dampness of generations. Excavated back into the hillside, the structure is visible only at the entrance. The door, a ponderous and forbidding slab of stone, hangs upon rusted iron hinges, and is fastened ajar in a queerly sinister way by means of heavy iron chains and padlocks, according to a gruesome fashion of half a century ago. The abode of the race whose scions are here inurned had once crowned the declivity which holds the tomb, but had long since fallen victim to the flames which sprang up from a stroke of lightning. Of the midnight storm which destroyed this gloomy mansion, the older inhabitants of the region sometimes speak in hushed and uneasy voices; alluding to what they call "divine wrath" in a manner that in later years vaguely increased the always strong fascination which I had felt for the forest-darkened sepulcher. One man only had perished in the fire. When the last of the Hydes was buried in this place of shade and stillness, the sad urnful of ashes had come from a distant land; to which the family had repaired when the mansion burned down. No one remains to lay flowers before the granite portal, and few care to brave the depressing shadows which seem to linger strangely about the water-worn stones.

I shall never forget the afternoon when first I stumbled upon the half-hidden house of death. It was in midsummer, when the alchemy of nature transmutes the sylvan landscape to one vivid and almost homogeneous mass of green; when the senses are well-nigh intoxicated with the surging seas of moist verdure and the subtly indefinable odors of the soil and the vegetation. In such surroundings the mind loses its perspective; time and space become trivial and unreal, and echoes of a forgotten prehistoric past beat insistently upon the enthralled consciousness.

All day I had been wandering through the mystic groves of the hollow; thinking thoughts I need not discuss, and conversing with things I need not name. In years a child of ten, I had seen and heard many wonders unknown to the throng; and was oddly aged in certain respects. When, upon forcing my way between two savage clumps of briars, I suddenly encountered the entrance of the vault, I had no knowledge of what I had discovered. The dark blocks of granite, the door so curiously ajar, and the funeral carvings above the arch, aroused in me no associations of mournful or terrible character. Of graves and tombs I knew and imagined much, but had on account of my peculiar temperament been kept from all personal contact with churchyards and cemeteries. The strange stone house on the woodland slope was to me only a source of interest and speculation; and its cold, damp interior, into which I vainly peered through the aperture so tantalizingly left, contained for me no hint of death or decay. But in that instant of curiosity was born the madly unreasoning desire which has brought me to this hell of confinement. Spurred on by a voice which must have come from the hideous soul of the forest, I resolved to enter the beckoning gloom in spite of the ponderous chains which barred my passage. In the waning light of day I alternately rattled the rusty impediments with a view to throwing wide the stone door, and essayed to squeeze

my slight form through the space already provided; but neither plan met with success. At first curious, I was now frantic; and when in the thickening twilight I returned to my home, I had sworn to the hundred gods of the grove that *at any cost* I would some day force an entrance to the black, chilly depths that seemed calling out to me. The physician with the iron-gray beard who comes each day to my room, once told a visitor that this decision marked the beginning of a pitiful monomania; but I will leave final judgment to my readers when they shall have learnt all.

The months following my discovery were spent in futile attempts to force the complicated padlock of the slightly open vault, and in carefully guarded inquiries regarding the nature and history of the structure. With the traditionally receptive ears of the small boy, I learned much; though an habitual secretiveness caused me to tell no one of my information or my resolve. It is perhaps worth mentioning that I was not at all surprized or terrified on learning of the nature of the vault. My rather original ideas regarding life and death had caused me to associate the cold clay with the breathing body in a vague fashion; and I felt that the great and sinister family of the burned-down mansion was in some way represented within the stone space I sought to explore. Mumbled tales of the weird rites and godless revels of bygone years in the ancient hall gave to me a new and potent interest in the tomb, before whose door I would sit for hours at a time each day. Once I thrust a candle within the nearly closed entrance, but could see nothing save a flight of damp stone steps leading downward. The odor of the place repelled yet bewitched me. I felt I had known it before, in a past remote beyond all recollection; beyond even my tenancy of the body I now possess.

The year after I first beheld the tomb, I stumbled upon a worm-eaten translation of Plutarch's *Lives* in the book-filled attic of my home. Reading the life of Theseus, I was much impressed by that passage telling of the great stone beneath which the boyish hero was to find his tokens of destiny whenever he should become old enough to lift its enormous weight. This legend had the effect of dispelling my keenest impatience to enter the vault, for it made me feel that the time was not yet ripe. Later, I told myself, I should grow to a strength and ingenuity which might enable me to unfasten the heavily chained door with ease; but until then I would do better by conforming to what seemed the will of Fate.

Accordingly my watches by the dank portal became less persistent, and much of my time was spent in other though equally strange pursuits. I would sometimes rise very quietly in the night, stealing out to walk in those churchyards and places of burial from which I had been kept by my parents. What I did there I may not say, for I am not now sure of the reality of certain things; but I know that on the day after such a nocturnal ramble I would often astonish those about me with my knowledge of topics almost forgotten for many generations. It was after a night like this that I shocked the community with a queer conceit about the burial of the rich and celebrated Squire Brewster, a maker of local history who was interred in 1711, and whose slate headstone, bearing a graven skull and crossbones, was slowly crumbling to powder. In a moment of childish imagination I vowed not only that the undertaker, Goodman Simpson, had stolen the silver-buckled shoes, silken hose, and satin small-clothes of the deceased before burial; but that the Squire himself, not fully inanimate, had turned

twice in his mound-covered coffin on the day after interment.

But the idea of entering the tomb never left my thoughts; being indeed stimulated by the unexpected genealogical discovery that my own maternal ancestry possessed at least a slight link with the supposedly extinct family of the Hydes. Last of my paternal race, I was likewise the last of this older and more mysterious line. I began to feel that the tomb was *mine*, and to look forward with hot eagerness to the time when I might pass within that stone door and down those slimy stone steps in the dark. I now formed the habit of listening very intently at the slightly open portal, choosing my favorite hours of midnight stillness for the odd vigil. By the time I came of age, I had made a small clearing in the thicket before the mold-stained façade of the hillside, allowing the surrounding vegetation to encircle and overhang the space like the walls and roof of a sylvan bower. This bower was my temple, the fastened door my shrine, and here I would lie outstretched on the mossy ground, thinking strange thoughts and dreaming strange dreams.

The night of the first revelation was a sultry one. I must have fallen asleep from fatigue, for it was with a distinct sense of awakening that I heard the voices. Of these tones and accents I hesitate to speak; of their quality I will not speak; but I may say that they presented certain uncanny differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and mode of utterance. Every shade of New England dialect, from the uncouth syllables of the Puritan colonists to the precise rhetoric of fifty years ago, seemed represented in that shadowy colloquy, though it was only later that I noticed the fact. At the time, indeed, my attention was distracted from this matter by another phenomenon; a phenomenon so fleeting that I could not take oath upon its reality. I barely fancied that as I awoke, a *light* had been hurriedly extinguished within the sunken sepulcher. I do not think I was either astounded or panic-stricken, but I know that I was greatly and permanently *changed* that night. Upon returning home I went with much directness to a rotting chest in the attic, wherein I found the key which next day unlocked with ease the barrier I had so long stormed in vain.

It was in the soft glow of late afternoon that I first entered the vault on the abandoned slope. A spell was upon me, and my heart leaped with an exultation I can but ill describe. As I closed the door behind me and descended the dripping steps by the light of my lone candle, I seemed to know the way; and though the candle sputtered with the stifling reek of the place, I felt singularly at home in the musty, charnel-house air. Looking about me, I beheld many marble slabs bearing coffins, or the remains of coffins. Some of these were sealed and intact, but others had nearly vanished, leaving the silver handles and plates isolated amidst certain curious heaps of whitish dust. Upon one plate I read the name of Sir Geoffrey Hyde, who had come from Sussex in 1640 and died here a few years later. In a conspicuous alcove was one fairly well preserved and untenanted casket, adorned with a single name which brought to me both a smile and a shudder. An odd impulse caused me to climb upon the broad slab, extinguish my candle, and lie down within the vacant box.

In the gray light of dawn I staggered from the vault and locked the chain of the door behind me. I was no longer a young man, though but twenty-one winters had chilled my bodily frame. Early-rising villagers who observed my homeward progress looked at me strangely, and marveled

at the signs of ribald revelry which they saw in one whose life was known to be sober and solitary. I did not appear before my parents till after a long and refreshing sleep.

Henceforward I haunted the tomb each night; seeing, hearing, and doing things I must never recall. My speech, always susceptible to environmental influences, was the first thing to succumb to the change; and my suddenly acquired archaism of diction was soon remarked upon. Later a queer boldness and recklessness came into my demeanor, till I unconsciously grew to possess the bearing of a man of the world despite my lifelong seclusion. My formerly silent tongue waxed voluble with the easy grace of a Chesterfield or the godless cynicism of a Rochester. I displayed a peculiar erudition utterly unlike the fantastic, monkish lore over which I had pored in youth; and covered the fly-leaves of my books with facile impromptu epigrams which brought up suggestions of Gay, Prior, and the sprightliest of the Augustan wits and rimesters. One morning at breakfast I came close to disaster by declaiming in palpably liquorish accents an effusion of Eighteenth Century bacchanalian mirth a bit of Georgian playfulness never recorded in a book, which ran something like this:

Come hither, my lads, with your tankards of ale,
And drink to the present before it shall fail;
Pile each on your platter a mountain of beef,
For 'tis eating and drinking that bring us relief:
So fill up your glass,
For life will soon pass;
When you're dead ye'll ne'er drink to your king or your lass!

Anacreon had a red nose, so they say;
But what's a red nose if ye're happy and gay?
Gad split me! I'd rather be red whilst I'm here,
Than white as a lily—and dead half a year!
So Betty, my miss,
Come give me a kiss;
In hell there's no innkeeper's daughter like this!

Young Harry, propp'd up just as straight as he's able,
Will soon lose his wig and slip under the table;
But fill up your goblets and pass 'em around—
Better under the table than under the ground!
So revel and chaff
As ye thirstily quaff:
Under six feet of dirt 'tis less easy to laugh!

The fiend strike me blue! I'm scarce able to walk,
And damn me if I can stand upright or talk!
Here, landlord, bid Betty to summon a chair;
I'll try home for a while, for my wife is not there!
So lend me a hand;
I'm not able to stand,
But I'm gay whilst I linger on top of the land!

About this time I conceived my present fear of fire and thunderstorms. Previously indifferent to such things, I had now an unspeakable horror of them; and would retire to the innermost recesses of the house whenever the heavens threatened an electrical display. A favorite haunt of mine during the day was the ruined cellar of the mansion that had burned down, and in fancy I would picture the structure as it had been in its prime. On one occasion I startled a villager by leading him confidently to a shallow sub-cellar, of whose existence I seemed to know in spite of the fact that it had been unseen and forgotten for many generations.

At last came that which I had long feared. My parents, alarmed at the altered manner and appearance of their only son, commenced to exert over my movements a kindly espionage which threatened to result in

disaster. I had told no one of my visits to the tomb, having guarded my secret purpose with religious zeal since childhood; but now I was forced to exercise care in threading the mazes of the wooded hollow, that I might throw off a possible pursuer. My key to the vault I kept suspended from a cord about my neck, its presence known only to me. I never carried out of the sepulcher any of the things I came upon whilst within its walls.

One morning as I emerged from the damp tomb and fastened the chain of the portal with none too steady hand, I beheld in an adjacent thicket the dreaded face of a watcher. Surely the end was near; for my bower was discovered, and the objective of my nocturnal journeys revealed. The man did not accost me, so I hastened home in an effort to overhear what he might report to my careworn father. Were my sojourns beyond the chained door about to be proclaimed to the world? Imagine my delighted astonishment on hearing the spy inform my parent in a cautious whisper *that I had spent the night in the bower outside the tomb;* my sleep-filmed eyes fixed upon the crevice where the padlocked portal stood ajar! By what miracle had the watcher been thus deluded? I was now convinced that a supernatural agency protected me. Made bold by this heaven-sent circumstance, I began to resume perfect openness in going to the vault; confident that no one could witness my entrance. For a week I tasted to the full the joys of that charnel conviviality which I must not describe, when the *thing* happened, and I was borne away to this accursed abode of sorrow and monotony.

I should not have ventured out that night; for the taint of thunder was in the clouds, and a hellish phosphorescence rose from the rank swamp at the bottom of the hollow. The call of the dead, too, was different. Instead of the hillside tomb, it was the charred cellar on the crest of the slope whose presiding demon beckoned to me with unseen fingers. As I emerged from an intervening grove upon the plain before the ruin, I beheld in the misty moonlight a thing I had always vaguely expected. The mansion, gone for a century, once more reared its stately height to the raptured vision; every window ablaze with the splendor of many candles. Up the long drive rolled the coaches of the Boston gentry, whilst on foot came a numerous assemblage of powdered exquisites from the neighboring mansions. With this throng I mingled, though I knew I belonged with the hosts rather than with the guests. Inside the hall were music, laughter, and wine on every hand. Several faces I recognized; though I should have known them better had they been shriveled or eaten away by death and decomposition. Amidst a wild and reckless throng I was the wildest and most abandoned. Gay blasphemy poured in torrents from my lips, and in my shocking sallies I heeded no law of God, man, or nature.

Suddenly a peal of thunder, resonant even above the din of the swinish revelry, clave the very roof and laid a hush of fear upon the boisterous company. Red tongues of flame and searing gusts of heat engulfed the house; and the roysterers, struck with terror at the descent of a calamity which seemed to transcend the bounds of unguided nature, fled shrieking into the night. I alone remained, riveted to my seat by a groveling fear which I had never felt before. And then a second horror took possession of my soul. Burnt alive to ashes, my body dispersed by the four winds, *I might never lie in the tomb of the Hydes!* Was not my coffin prepared for me? Had I not a right to rest till eternity amongst the descendants of Sir Geoffrey Hyde?

Aye! I would claim my heritage of death, even though my soul go seeking through the ages for another corporeal tenement to represent it on that vacant slab in the alcove of the vault. *Jervas Hyde* should never share the sad fate of Palinurus!

As the phantom of the burning house faded, I found myself screaming and struggling madly in the arms of two men, one of whom was the spy who had followed me to the tomb. Rain was pouring down in torrents, and upon the southern horizon were flashes of the lightning that had so lately passed over our heads. My father, his face lined with sorrow, stood by as I shouted my demands to be laid within the tomb; frequently admonishing my captors to treat me as gently as they could. A blackened circle on the floor of the ruined cellar told of a violent stroke from the heavens; and from this spot a group of curious villagers with lanterns were prying a small box of antique workmanship, which the thunderbolt had brought to light.

Ceasing my futile and now objectless writhing, I watched the spectators as they viewed the treasure-trove, and was permitted to share in their discoveries. The box, whose fastenings were broken by the stroke which had unearthed it, contained many papers and objects of value; but I had eyes for one thing alone. It was the porcelain miniature of a young man in a smartly curled bag-wig, and bore the initials "J. H." The face was such that as I gazed, I might well have been studying my mirror.

On the following day I was brought to this room with the barred windows, but I have been kept informed of certain things through an aged and simple-minded servitor, for whom I bore a fondness in infancy, and who, like me, loves the churchyard. What I have dared relate of my experiences within the vault has brought me only pitying smiles. My father, who visits me frequently, declares that at no time did I pass the chained portal, and swears that the rusted padlock had not been touched for fifty years when he examined it. He even says that all the village knew of my journeys to the tomb, and that I was often watched as I slept in the bower outside the grim façade, my half-open eyes fixed on the crevice that leads to the interior. Against these assertions I have no tangible proof to offer, since my key to the padlock was lost in the struggle on that night of horrors. The strange things of the past which I have learned during those nocturnal meetings with the dead he dismisses as the fruits of my lifelong and omnivorous browsing amongst the ancient volumes of the family library. Had it not been for my old servant Hiram, I should have by this time become quite convinced of my madness.

But Hiram, loyal to the last, has held faith in me, and has done that which impels me to make public at least a part of my story. A week ago he burst open the lock which chains the door of the tomb perpetually ajar, and descended with a lantern into the murky depths. On a slab in an alcove he found an old but empty coffin whose tarnished plate bears the single word: *Jervas.* In that coffin and in that vault they have promised me I shall be buried.

LENORE

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

(Reprint)

Ah, broken is the golden bowl! the spirit flown for ever!
Let the bell toll!—a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river.
And, Guy de Vere, hast *thou* no tear?—weep now or never more!
See! on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love, Lenore!
Come! let the burial rite be read—the funeral song be sung!—
An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young—
A dirge for her, the doubly dead in that she died so young.

"Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride,
And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her—that she died!
How *shall* the ritual, then, be read?—the requiem how be sung
By you—by yours, the evil eye,—by yours, the slanderous tongue,
That did to death the innocence that died, and died so young?"

Peccavimus; but rave not thus! and let a Sabbath song
Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel no wrong!
The sweet Lenore hath "gone before," with Hope, that flew beside,
Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have been thy bride—
For her, the fair and debonair, that now so lowly lies,
The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes—
The life still there, upon her hair—the death upon her eyes.

"Avaunt! tonight my heart is light. No dirge will I upraise,
But waft the angel on her flight with a pæan of old days!
Let *no* bell toll!—lest her sweet soul, amid its hallowed mirth,
Should catch the note, as it doth float up from the damnèd Earth.
To friends above, from fiends below, the indignant ghost is riven—
From Hell unto a high estate far up within the Heaven—
From grief and groan to a golden throne beside the King of Heaven."

BLACK MAGIC! What horrors these two words suggest, and yet what fascinating pictures as well! It was by black magic that the medieval devil-worshipers sought to subdue the powers of nature to their purposes, and spread the empire of that personal devil to whom they had promised their souls. In the Faust-legend, it was black magic by which the old seer summoned Mephistopheles before him; it was black magic by which men hoped to attain dominion over the Earth and subdue their fellow-men. And it was by black magic that they hoped to force the infernal legions of evil to grant them life eternal here on this Earth, and push back the grave.

Stories of black magic held a peculiar power over the minds of men in the Middle Ages, when witchcraft was accepted as unquestioningly as we accept the fact that the Earth moves around the sun. And now H. P. Lovecraft has dipped his pen into the ancient legends and written for the readers of WEIRD TALES two remarkable stories of black magic, in which the ancient dark arts are given a modern setting in our own America. Those readers who recall *The Rats in the Walls*, published in this magazine last year, will find in Mr. Lovecraft's newest story, *The Horror at Red Hook*, all the dark terror and weird mystery that made the earlier story a masterpiece of eery fiction, with an even more vivid portrayal of the evil rites of the devil-worshipers, and a climax of subterranean horror that is utterly breath-taking. This story will be published soon, and also a companion story called *He*, about a New Yorker who remained alive for centuries through his black arts, only to be overwhelmed by the legions of evil he had sought to control.

W. Elwyn Backus' interplanetary serial, *The Waning of a World*, seems to have caught the fancy of our readers, many of whom have written in enthusiastic praise of it. There is something immensely stimulating to the imagination in the thought that man can sometime visit neighboring worlds, and the stories on this subject that have appeared from time to time in WEIRD TALES have all been very popular with you, the readers; for instance, *Draconda, Invaders From Outside,* and *When the Green Star Waned.* Will Smith has written an interplanetary story that strikes an entirely new note. It is called *Other Earths*, and will be published soon.

"There was only one thing that I hated most abnormally about *The Waning of a World,*" writes John W. Pelton, from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, "and that is the three words 'TO BE CONTINUED'. Why did editors invent such words as these? Just when it was most interesting you cut it off completely."

The story will be brought to a satisfactory close next month, and the burning question as to whether the occupants of the *Sphere* reached Earth again will be settled.

Harold Newman, of Portland, Oregon, writes to The Eyrie: "Last January, as I was waiting for a street-car, the wind, blowing harder than usual, forced me to take refuge in a confectionery store. But 'tis an ill wind that blows nobody good, for I saw a copy of WEIRD TALES in a rack, and out of curiosity picked it up and opened it. Well, I missed three cars before I came out of my 'trance.' *Whispering Tunnels* was the story I was reading I bought that magazine and haven't missed a copy since. The stories I have liked best are *Servants of Satan, The Horror on the Links, Wings of Power, The Gargoyle,* and *The Werewolf of Ponkert.* The kind I like best are the semi-scientific and the tales of other planets."

Writes Alvin V. Pershing, of Mt. Ayr, Indiana: "*The Eternal Conflict,* by Nictzin Dyalhis, is absolutely the best story of this kind I have ever read. *The Gargoyle* by Greye La Spina and *The Stolen Body* by H. G. Wells in the November issue are rare gems. They are brimful of a sweet and delightful horror, realistic impossibilities, and blissful fiendishness. They thrilled with astral mysticism and uncanny adventure to the last word. When I read Mr. Wells' story I felt all the gruesome and supernatural things that were mentioned when Mr. Bessel was a prisoner in the veiled world into which he dared venture."

"Why not have a popularity contest of writers who have written four or more stories in WEIRD TALES?" suggests F. C. McKnight, of Louisville, Kentucky, who adds: "I vote right now for Lovecraft, who is much the best, in my opinion."

Muriel E. Eddy, of Providence, Rhode Island, writes: "*Lukundoo,* by Edward Lucas White, in your November issue, receives my vote, as it is by far the most noteworthy, really thrilling and chilling tale you have yet published. It calls to my mind a story I read years ago (by a titled Englishman), entitled *The Hand of Fate,* wherein the unfortunate hero was fatally marked by an Egyptian magician, before his birth, by a snake. The snake began its growth from the birth of the hero, slowly, bit by bit, out of his side, causing his death. In that story no one dared destroy the hideous monster growing from the man's side, as to have done so (some thought) would have caused him to bleed to death."

Writes Richard McDonald, of St. Louis: "I have noticed lately that a number of readers have been telling you to leave out the natural explanations to ghost stories. I, however, am in favor of these explanations, as I think they are the spice of the story. My favorite in the November issue was *The Headless Spokesman.*"

Lester Lucas, of Parkville, Maryland, asks that Nictzin Dyalhis write a sequel to *The Eternal Conflict* in which the Earthling has further adventures in the celestial realms. "I think your pseudo-scientific stories are wonderfully interesting," he writes; "let us have more of them."

"Your November issue is good," writes Mrs. Margaret Del Percio, of South Amboy, New Jersey, "but I would prefer more short and terrible tales such as *The Headless Spokesman* or *The Fiend of the Seine.*"

Writes George Murphy, of Philadelphia: "I like the stories of the 'possible but not probable' kind, like *When the Green Star Waned* and *The Wan-*

ing of a World, which has just started. Who knows, some day someone may do these very things we read about. Remember, people laughed when Jules Verne wrote about his submarine."

Mildred and Mortimer Kaufmann, of Philadelphia, write to The Eyrie: "After reading the November issue, both our votes go unreservedly for *Lukundoo,* the master-tale by Edward Lucas White. This story is startling in its unusualness. Please let us have piles of stories of interplanetary trips and wars between the worlds."

Writes Joseph P. Mayotte, of Minneapolis: "I like all the stories in the November WEIRD TALES, but the best one I read was *The Return of the Undead.* I read that story just before rolling off to sleep. Well, sir, try as I might, I could not woo Morpheus. I tossed and rolled about for an hour or more, my mind reviewing all the horrible details of that gruesome story. Previous to retiring, I had left my bedroom door open, the better to get the benefit of a faint breeze. A sudden gust of wind slammed the door, and I jumped so violently that I awoke my wife. 'For crying out loud,' she said, as she snapped on the light over the bed, 'how many times do I have to tell you not to drink coffee before going to bed? If you don't stop tossing around, I will make you sleep on the floor.' Uselessly I tried to explain that it was the story I had read. 'Applesauce' was all the satisfaction I got out of her. The next morning when I awoke, there she was, propped up on the bed, reading that story. She finished the last part a short time after I awoke, and she threw the magazine to the other side of the room. I looked at her in amazement, and the perspiration had broken out on her forehead. I laughed so violently that she threw the pillow at me. WEIRD TALES has gained another steady reader."

The Gargoyle, Greye La Spina's serial novel of devil-worship, which ended in the November number, proved very popular. Several of the readers, however, thought that the author was needlessly cruel. Writes one, who asks that his name be not used: "*The Gargoyle* was fascinating to the last word; but why did Greye La Spina have to kill off poor, dear, lovable, inoffensive Alden? And little, pompous Binney? I think everybody was happy when the wicked Guy Fane went to his death in the blowing up of Fanewold; but the author might have spared the lives of Alden and Binney."

Writes George T. Spillman, from Providence, R. I.: "I do not believe there ever was a story, in the countless tales I have devoured, that evoked such enthusiasm from me as *The Waning of a World.* I think, if the rest of the story lives up to installment one, that *The Waning of a World* may prove to be the most absorbing narrative ever printed in WEIRD TALES. Nothing could have dragged me away after the first three pages. Never before have I been interested in any story dealing with mechanical contrivances, for I have no head for such, but this story utterly fascinated me."

And now, friends, let us know what is your favorite story in the present issue. The only way we can keep the magazine in accord with your likes is to hear from you. Let us know which story you like best, and if there are stories in WEIRD TALES that you don't like, or that you think should not be in the magazine, we want to know about them also. Send in your choice to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The readers' first choice among the stories in the November issue was *The Return of the Undead,* by Arthur Leeds, which was closely pressed for first honors by Edward Lucas White's eery African story, *Lukundoo.*

On the Dead Man's Chest

(Continued from page 28)

"We don't believe in them," Daniels asserted sharply.

"Not on the surface, if we're good *Circlers,*" Underwood admitted with studied calmness. "Underneath, I think we'd all like to believe, or possibly *do* faintly believe at heart. I judge by myself. I've been as rabid a scoffer as any of you for nine years. About five years ago I began to think we were all wrong. The woods turned me, first. You know how I love trees, and how I spend my time in them. I'd like to see any really intelligent man who can spend year after year in the woods and still honestly deny a creator. Nobody could make that much beauty but God! It kept growing on me. I tell you we can all scoff to our measly mind's content, Lafe, but when we face death we drop all that nonsense mighty quick and begin to look around for something to hold on to. And if we look hard enough, we find Him. I did."

"Who's facing death?" Daniels cut in, curtly.

"I am." The settled sadness lent to the preposterous face a strange kind of majestic dignity. "I am, Lafe. Two and a half years ago several perfectly competent specialists told me I had about three years to live. They described to me certain symptoms by which I would know when the end should be approaching. I said nothing to anybody then. But the last week all the symptoms they named have been decidedly in evidence. When I knew my time was so short, after talking to those doctors, I hit for the woods and stayed away a week, all by myself, in a little mountain hotel. Peter may remember that incident. I just sat around there on the veranda. I had the whole hotel almost to myself, and thought and reasoned. All my inchoate gropings toward a sound belief crystallized. I fought toward my God—and found him—in the woods. But something else had been growing on me, too. The *Squared Circle!*"

"What's wrong with the *Squared Circle?*" Daniels asked, with fine sarcasm. Peter Garvin held his breath, staring at Underwood's face. He'd kept his peace all to no purpose. Felix would be expelled for this! But the huge Underwood, not noticing Garvin, sat up heavily on the divan, leaning forward, his light eyes boring into the banker's keen hazel ones.

"We're a pack of unmitigated fools, that's what's the matter!" he retorted hotly. "The way we rave against God and the soul and eternal life is rank blasphemy, and if we don't pull up short we're going to be brought to account for it. Think of it! Fifty picked bachelors, with the force of social prestige and wealth behind us, flaunting atheism to the world. And it's all on the shoulders of the *Inner Circle.* The others follow us like a drove of sheep. What we do, they'll do. I've got to work on the *Inner Circle.*"

"Work on them?" Daniels interrupted, his face stern and cold. "You yourself are the one who had better pull up, Felix. You're a valuable member, we all like you. And if you're worried about an imminent demise I can forgive a lot—though I'd forget it, if I were in your place. Specialists are often altogether mistaken. But as the president of the *Inner Circle* I must admit there is a limit to my patience. If you continue to expound such rot I shall certainly find it my duty to expel you." Pete Garvin gripped the arm of his chair, ready to cry out to Underwood to stop while there was time. But the big man's mottled face flamed as he

brought one heavy fist down on the edge of the divan and shot back his answer.

"Expel and be damned! Try it once! You'll never get the chance—I'd be dead before you could put it through. I know what I'm doing, and I know what this society of ours is doing! We're a menace to decent-thinking people. We're a blot on the face of the earth. We're a pack of sinister blasphemers doomed to a nasty finish if we don't right-about face. And we're going to right-about, old-timer! See here, Lafe. I'm an ugly object, eh?"

The banker started slightly, taken unawares by such direct attack. But he was possessed of deeper insight and surer perception than Pete Garvin. He stared intently into Underwood's little, washed-out blue eyes, and staring, saw straight into the sore soul; and seeing, knew exactly the right thing to say.

Unflinching, he answered, "Yes. Ugly as hell. Gross, bulky, repulsive, a perfect caricature of all a man ought to be. But"—and Daniels' voice grew gentle—"the man inside is extremely fine, my dear Felix. The man inside is as beautiful as—as God would be if there were a God." For a moment the big man did not speak, and Garvin bit his lip at the baldness of the banker's words. He shot a look at Underwood's face. The pale eyes were shining.

"Ah!" Underwood said, softly. "Thank you. But—what *is* the man inside, Lafe? The soul! And there is a God, make no mistake about that. He knows all of us. He knows me. He knows how I've lived in torture since childhood because He slipped when He created me. He knows, I tell you. And whatever others may say of Him—He's just! He doesn't want me to go on through eternity like this. He's willing to stand by, because He too knows that I've got to go. And He'll see me through in what I'm going to do."

"What are you going to do?" Daniels asked, no longer angry, touched at the big man's evident belief in his coming death, certain within himself that Felix was a "bit off."

"Shed it!" Underwood clenched one heavy fist. "Shed it! After I die I'm coming back and bowl you guys over. I'm going to make you see light and become sane men before it's too late. I'm coming back and jar you all out of that damnable atheism. I've got a whale of an idea. I'm going to tie you fellows up into such a knot that when you get it unraveled you're going to take off your hats and say, 'By God, Felix was right!'"

Daniels smiled. Yes, poor old Felix was off in the head. That was the only explanation. He'd been a bit stunned in the beginning by such an outburst from Underwood. But you couldn't remain angry with a man who sincerely believed he was on the edge of death, a man who had always been a favorite in the *Inner Circle*. Humor him now, that was the thing, let him rave, and keep him from spilling his unfortunate condition to the rest. What these specialists stirred up, anyhow! In a week or two old Felix's imagined symptoms would pass, and he'd right himself, good as new. The banker's smile grew conciliatory, and his quiet answer was calculated to soothe the big man's excitement.

"I wish you could, Felix. But it isn't possible. Believe me, my friend, when you kick out—and may it be many years hence—you'll go into the dirt and become dirt like anyone else. That's why I say there isn't any God. Can't be. It's a fiendish creator who could make men, give them consciousness, the power to see, think, hear, love and be happy, then blow them out like a dry lamp and turn 'em back to dust. I can't conceive of anyone even on the level of an intelligent

human doing such a thing—let alone an omniscient God!"

"They don't turn back to dust," the big man answered steadily. "Only the body does that. They go on somewhere——"

"Oh, rot!" Daniels interrupted, his impatience rising afresh. " 'They go on somewhere!' The age-old cry of superstitious cowards who are afraid to face the dark. They can't even formulate any logical process by which the going on may be accomplished. If they go on, why don't some of them come back and tell us about it? If they go on, there must be some way of reaching us afterward, and no one has ever been able to do it. No one has ever been able to establish the slightest proof that could appeal to the clear thinker who sees things his own way and who is strong enough to refuse to have his thinking done for him. Laugh that off!"

"I don't have to." Underwood's ponderous bass voice grew tense, and the expression of sadness on his repulsive face curdled into pugnacious fighting lines as he leaned forward and hammered his words belligerently at the banker. "I'll just show you. No one could ever make you believe by telling you what he himself knows. Every individual who has come into contact with those gone on before is convinced for himself, but he can seldom convince another. It's the individual's problem. And no small demonstration would convince such a hard-boiled skeptic as you, Lafe. The rest of the *Inner Circle*, yes, the whole *Squared Circle*, will follow any way you lead. You've got 'em licked, got 'em eating out of the palm of your hand. When I get *you*, I'll get *them*. And *I'll get you!*"

"How?" inquired Daniels, smiling indulgently at Underwood's intensity, increasingly convinced of the big man's temporary insanity.

"I'm going to take several of you into my confidence and hatch out to the last detail this stupendous scheme I've concocted. I'm going to swear you all to secrecy. None of you are to know what the others know, and none of you will be able to see just what I've been up to till you do know what the others know."

"Sounds like a Chinese puzzle," Daniels interrupted.

"Well, *you'll* solve it!" Underwood snapped. He got heavily to his feet, and his booming voice thundered on. "See here, Lafe, if I come back and show myself to you, prove that I am standing right by you where you can hear me, see me, even touch me if you choose, when you know that the Felix Underwood who was once your associate is ready for the worms—will you believe there is something afterward?"

"Certainly," Daniels answered without hesitation. "Only a fool could do otherwise."

"Yes." Underwood flashed, "you'll believe. And you'll retract all your scoffing ridicule and harsh unbelief. You'll no longer be able to profess the slightest doubt of the abiding immortality of the soul. You'll know there is a God, and you'll get on better terms with Him. You'll give society at large the shock of its young life, and proclaim the entire regeneration of the creed of the *Squared Circle*. Because I'm going to do it! *I'm going to do it!* And I'm going to shed—this. I'm coming back in a body as upright and physically perfect as any of you can imagine."

"If you do that," the banker cut in cruelly, "how do you expect me to know you?"

"That was a nasty one, Lafe!" The big man's repellent face quivered, and Daniels was instantly shamed. "I'll answer it in a minute. Before I do, tell me this: if I come back, changed into a perfectly formed, fine-looking man—through

the help of God (no soul could recreate like that without God's aid)—well, if together with God I build this body over; say we take some fine-looking chap worthy using as a model, and form this misshapen clay into his image, and I come back and show myself to you—make that body rise and walk among you with my soul inside it, will you believe in the God who made it possible?"

Little, washed-out blue eyes held keen hazel eyes for a tense moment that seemed an eternity to the wrought-up Pete Garvin who sat watching them, locked in the grip of his emotion, unable to move. The banker's jaw set tight.

"Yes," he answered, quietly but very soberly. He realized at last that Underwood was entirely sane, as sane as he himself. He realized that Underwood believed what he was saying, and atheist that he sincerely was, Lafe Daniels felt some mighty undercurrent sweeping from the huge man, some undercurrent he could not understand. "Yes. If you can do that, even I would have to believe. But how will I know you?"

"You'll watch the body change." Underwood sighed, as though some great battle had been fought and won. "You'll see some man you know, *some member of the Inner Circle,* being copied right before your eyes as though God Himself were reaching down to mold soft wax. And if that is not enough—you'll know me by this."

He drew from his pocket the wallet Peter Garvin had seen on the hilltop that afternoon and took from it the sprig of immortelle.

"It's white. It's like us—it never dies. And you'll say that anybody could go and pick a sprig of immortelle and run a hoax on you. So I'll just block that—as I'll block any avenue of comeback you can find."

He glanced quickly around the room, and his searching eyes stopped on the writing desk by the window. He crossed the room to it and uncovered the inkwell, finding it filled to the brim with bright green ink. He dipped the small cluster of flowers into the emerald writing fluid and drew it out, dripping, dyed a brilliant green. With his handkerchief he blotted the dripping ink, waving the blossoms gently in the air to dry them, while Daniels and Garvin watched with intent, curious interest.

"Here, Lafe—take it." He inserted the green-dyed sprig into the wallet and extended the wallet toward the banker. "When I'm dead and laid out in my coffin I want you to lay this flower squarely in the center of my chest and pin it there. And when I come back I'll show it to you. Take it!"

Daniels accepted the wallet, stood holding it for a moment, then walked to the desk, drew out a drawer, dropped the wallet into it and locked the drawer, a peculiar kind of reluctance in his movements.

"All right, I'll do it." His voice was oddly strained. "I may be a skeptic, and a genuinely sincere atheist, but I carry an open mind."

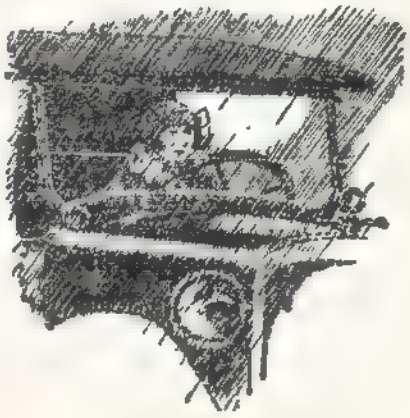
He looked straight into Underwood's eyes, smiling. Underwood smiled back, whimsically.

"That's a challenge, eh? Very well, you wait! What about you, Peter? You haven't said a word since I came." The huge travesty of a man turned to Garvin. Pete shook his head, his eyes staring at his old comrade as though he had never seen him before.

"I—I'm dumb," he stammered. "But I guess that goes for me, too."

"You're not so much of a doubter as you think you are, Peter," Underwood smiled affectionately, though his words were terse. "You're half convinced already. Well, I'll be off."

He pulled his hat down over his eyes and turned toward the door.



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"Good night, boys. Think it over."

And with a dry smile on his heavy mouth, the big man opened the door, squeezed through the insufficient opening and was gone.

"He means it," Garvin said, dumfoundedly, after a long silence. "But he can't do it."

"Of course he can't!" Daniels laughed, in vague relief. "He's just brooded over his unfortunate appearance so much that he's a monomaniac on the subject. Then"—the banker's voice softened—"facing death for nearly three years because of some fool specialist's fool predictions, added to that, was too much. It's warped his brain. There was a weak spot in the first place, or the warping couldn't have ensued, no matter what the provocation. I'd never have thought it could happen to Felix. Too bad! He's a mighty good sort! We—we'll have to be considerate of him till he forgets this nonsense."

Garvin did not answer immediately. He was wondering if it were really possible that old Felix was scheduled to die. What a rum go! How would he get along without Felix? He turned his eyes to the locked drawer.

"Are you going to—do it?" he asked with difficulty.

"Do it?" Daniels raised his eyebrows in surprize, as he followed Garvin's gaze and caught his meaning. "Oh. Why, certainly. Did I not tell him I would? He's dead serious. And I'm—I'm curious! Of course I'll do it!"

A week passed, and in that time neither Garvin nor Daniels saw much of the man over whom they were so concerned. He was very busy, running here and there, and very secretive about what he was doing.

Daniels was beginning to feel a genuine anxiety about Underwood.

It was late evening, and several members of the *Inner Circle* were gathered around the fireplace in their particular sanctum, mockingly called the Holy of Holies, smoking and arguing about the probabilities of a war in the near future, and the fiendish contrivances that might be invented for use in such a war.

The banker, leaning indolently against the mantel, glanced around the room and asked, irrelevantly, "Where's Pete Garvin tonight? Anybody know?"

"Yes." Dr. L. Sage Hammerton, vice-president, and second only to Lafe Daniels in atheistic belief and skeptical comment, nodded in reply. "He's gone to a show with Felix Underwood. Said they'd be back about 10 o'clock. They're about half an hour late, but that's not unusual."

No one made any remark, and for a moment conversation lagged. Then John Morgan began some idle comment anent the interrupted subject of near war when the call-boy appeared in the doorway.

"Telephone for Dr. Hammerton. Imperative. Will you please hurry, sir?"

Hammerton rose to follow the boy, and Daniels said with mock sympathy, "It's hell to be a doctor, eh, Sage? Never let you have a moment's peace."

Hammerton nodded, grinning, and shrugged as he went out the door.

The talk among the men resumed its former trend, and they had a neat, bloody massacre all mapped out when Hammerton paused in the doorway, his hat in his hand, his top-coat over his arm, and an expression of shock and dismay on his face.

"It was Pete Garvin," he said, and the tone of his voice sent an abrupt hush over the room, drawing every eye to his face in quick appre-

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hension. "Felix Underwood is dead. Dropped on the street as they were coming out of the show. I may be back."

Silence held the room as he turned away and strode rapidly down the hall. Felix had been a favorite far beyond his wildest imagination, in spite of his Caliban exterior. More men than Daniels had looked beyond the gross, distorted flesh to the God-like soul inside. Furtively each man glanced at the others, feeling a keen, overwhelming sense of loss.

No more would the rumbling basso strive earnestly to assure Doc Hammerton that he ought to use Red Devil spark plugs. No more would they all sit in indulgent amusement while the deep thunderous bass argued Tink Wardell out of buying a V-type engine. No more would the depression in the big leather chair by the fireplace support that monstrous bulk while they crowded around him, jeering, deriding, jesting, but admiring and loving him at the same time. *Felix Underwood was dead!*

Several pairs of eyes turned to the great empty chair. No one else ever sat in it. Long since, because it was the only chair there in which he sat in comfort, it was by unspoken, common consent Felix's chair. With a sudden under-the-breath oath and a catch in his throat, Tink Wardell sprang to his feet, crossed the room and turned the big chair gently face to the wall.

But the banker's eyes, alone of all the eyes watching him, saw not the worn, shiny back of the chair—but only a small, green-dyed sprig of immortelle.

Did Felix Underwood reach back from the grave to do what he had promised? Read the next thrilling chapters of this story, in next month's issue.

Stealer of Souls

(Continued from page 20)

manner of his ultimate passing was the big question.

At the home of the judge a cordon of police guarded the house and grounds. Inside the house there were a few men—police officials, close friends, and a few relatives, together with Sanders and myself from the press. The judge sat with his son in another room as night drew on. They were conversing in low tones, distinctly audible to us out in the library.

Despite their nervous strain they seemed quite calm. After a time—at about 9 o'clock—the son made his father lie down on the couch. Perhaps an hour later, when the judge seemed to be dozing, the son came to the door for a moment and spoke.

"I am going to close this door," he said. "There is going to be fought in this room tonight, if I am correct in my surmise, a terrible battle. It will be a battle of good against evil; right against wrong. I feel that it will be better for us to fight this out alone. Weapons will not avail; only the strategy of a clean brain. Whether or not my brain will prove capable to cope with the situation we shall soon learn."

He went into the room and closed the door behind him. We sat out there in the library in absolute horror for perhaps two hours. What was going on behind that door? What? The minutes dragged. We had conversed now and again in low tones, but there was about our conversation a pathetic lack of force. It was lifeless, dead.

Midnight!

From beyond the door came the wail of a soul in torment. Came a cry of sheer horror from the throat

Next Month

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of the judge's son. Came the crash of a pistol.

We rushed in, but the judge was dead, the pistol with which he had taken his own life tightly clutched in his right hand. On the couch lay the son—his face livid with unspeakable fear, his eyes wide with terror, his body rigid as death.

It was a somber gathering in the office of the warden. The judge's son was there, the police magistrate and captain, two detectives, prison officials, and Sanders and myself from the press. We were met there to hear from the lips of the judge's son the story of what passed behind the door. Afterward the hunchback was to face young Fowler.

First, however, they listened to the guard who was head of the watch which had been placed over Rolf Jaeke. He said: "I noticed nothing unusual. The prisoner lay on his bed and did not move during the entire evening. He lay so still that once I thought he was actually dead. But a little after midnight he apparently awoke and began to scream that the judge was dead. 'Fourteen men,' he said. 'Fourteen men, and all have paid. I told 'em they must pay. Fourteen men are gone, and the judge is number fourteen.' Well, we quieted him by means I won't go into here."

Young Fowler spoke: "You are sure that the man made no move whatever between the hours of 11 and 12?"

"I'm positive, sir."

"You know this yourself?"

"I do. I kept watch from about 9 till the fool began to howl. During that time I saw every move he made."

The face of young Fowler went white with pain.

"Gentlemen," he said, "had I followed the urge that was within my

heart and come out here yesterday and killed Rolf Jaeke, my father would be alive today."

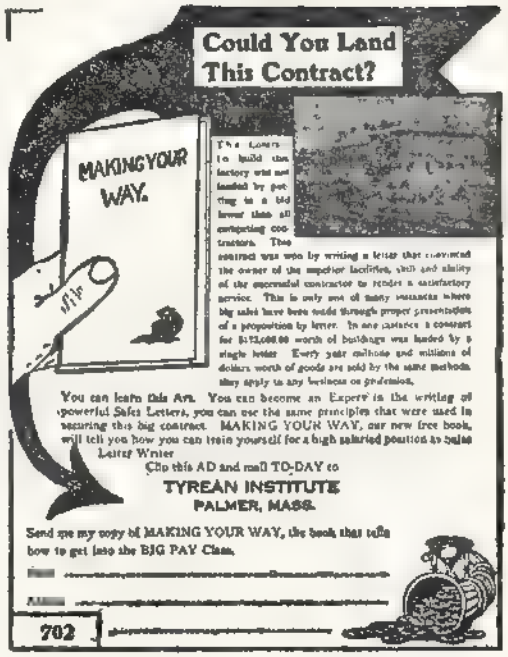
"You have a theory, then?" asked the warden.

"I have a theory. It will not be believed, but then I can't stop to think of that. These deaths are not mere coincidences. That we can easily guess. I repeat: I doubt that you will believe my story, but tell it I will.

"As you know, gentlemen, I am a student of psychology. Being such, I have gone deeply into the things which cause the various reactions in individuals. I have made a deep and exacting study of that thing which we call the human soul. That there is some directing force behind every individual you will admit. Now the question is this: what is the soul? Can it or can it not be divided from the individual without death resulting? Gentlemen, from what I have found through study I believe that it can. During the time I have been here, I have studied out many things in the life of Rolf Jaeke which are not generally known. I find that he was a student of the occult, of the stars, of the soul. I find that as a lad he traveled over the country with a Hindoo seer, who doubtless taught him the things of which I speak. I shall tell you my story, gentlemen, and shall leave it to you whether or not I am insane—or lying.

"Here, then, is what happened within the room where my father died. We sat there waiting for a long time—endless hours it seemed. My father knew that we were waiting for something—what, he could not guess. But I knew. And I shall tell you. *We were waiting for the soul of Rolf Jaeke to appear and begin the insidious work of destruction!*

"My friends, I say I have long studied these things. Long ago I came



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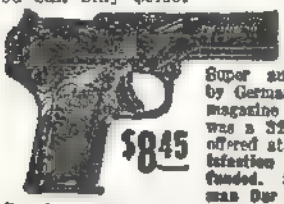

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to the conclusion that an individual under proper conditions can cast forth his soul from his body, leaving the body dead and useless since its driving power is gone. Gentlemen, we waited there for hours, and presently this soul appeared—a gaunt, wraithlike substance which I felt rather than saw. I knew what it would try to do, this astral self of Rolf Jacke's. I knew what it had done in the cases of the other victims. Enraged by the verdict of the jury, the maddened mind of the hunchback sought about for a way of revenge. He had long practised this sending of his inner being on pilgrimages into the unknown. Now he decided he had a sure method for revenge. He cast out his soul from his body, the soul taking instant flight to the victim to whom it was directed. In the first case—that of the mayor—the rebel soul was not strong enough to root out the other while Mr. Andrews was awake so he waited till he slept, and the driving force sleeping with the body, his work was easy. With merciless precision the one soul—the soul of evil—rooted out the other, taking its place. Thus the soul of Rolf Jacke became the driving power behind Jason Andrews. The body was the same, the brain the same, the intellect the same—all save the driving force behind. The fact that for a moment—and in the case of the hunchback for hours—the body was without life made little difference, for the body being perfectly healthy could take up life where it was left off when the original soul returned.

"I see, gentlemen, that some of you are astounded, that some of you are incredulous, but wait—how many of you here believed ten years ago that there could be a radio; how many in this world believed only a short time ago that there could be an airplane, a submarine, a phonograph,

a telephone? Do you deny absolutely the existence of spirit communication with the dead? Why shouldn't this thing be possible? I say it is.

"So, my friends, did Rolf Jaeke complete his revenge. One by one he took the souls of his victims and cast them out, captured the body and brain with his own soul and set them to do his will. Body and brain had to obey the driving power.

"Thus he caused Jason Andrews to kill a man, Dr. Linn to become a fiend, and so on. The one crime he was not guilty of directly was the death of the six. But in the day of judgment he must answer for this too, for had it not been for him they would not have become drunk and so gone to their deaths.

"Last of all he came for my father, the judge. Like a thief in the night he came. And I—I in my egotism—thought that I could combat him. I knew that armed force would not avail, but I thought the power of a trained mind could overcome his soul. I was wrong in my belief. I failed miserably.

"I sensed the soul coming. I tried to cast forth my own soul against the evil, but to no avail. In a trance I sat and knew full well that his soul was entering my father's body. I struggled. And I saw my father struggle. No man can dream what a struggle he made that night. I saw it. It is seared in my brain forever—what I saw. I saw an expression like the consuming canker of all the evil in the world come over his face. I saw his lips draw in a snarl. I saw the blood filter out of his face, leaving it gaunt and lined and mean. I saw him reach for the revolver in the desk. My God, why didn't I remember to take it out? I saw him grin malevolently at me as he raised the gun to shoot me. And I prayed God in that moment that he would kill

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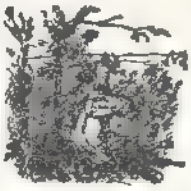

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me; but he didn't. Evidently the soul—the rebel soul within him—sensed my desire and refused to gratify it. Anyway he raised the gun, smiled mirthlessly, and shot himself through the brain.

"And I sensed the rebel soul leaving his body in that fraction of an instant before death came to body and brain. And over in one corner I heard a little whimpering sound. Gentlemen, it was the wail of a broken soul, for I believe that the soul of a dead body can never again take up abode on earth.

"That is all, my friends. I understand that the hunchback is to be brought here. Am I right?"

"Bring the prisoner in," directed the warden.

"Believe that yarn?" I asked Sanders.

"I think he's insane," was the answer.

INTO the room was brought, then, Rolf Jaeke, the hunchback and—if the story were true—the arch criminal, the stealer of souls. He was cool and collected. He heard the charges against him, admitted them without exception, and told them that young Fowler was right.

"You will hang for this," said the warden.

"I will not hang," said the hunchback. "Presently I will cast out my soul from this worthless, scorned shell of body and brain and take possession of a fine, clean body like—ah, perhaps like that of the late judge's son."

Young Fowler scowled but he was very calm.

"It would take a little time to force out my soul."

"Oh, perhaps."

"Did you ever stop to think what would happen were you killed while

(Continued on page 143)

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(Continued from page 140)

your soul was still in your body, Jaeke? I'm of the opinion that under those circumstances some cord of relationship with the human race would be severed, thus making it impossible for you to enter another body."

"What do you mean?" The hunchback was on his feet.

The judge's son said not a word. He was smiling as he suddenly flipped a revolver from his pocket and shot the prisoner through the heart. Over the face of Rolf Jaeke there came an expression of unspeakable fear; and he was dead.

Young Fowler stood up, calm, hard, cold as ice.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if you wish to arrest me for murder, now is the time. I was well aware that under the conditions the usual care would not be taken; and I could not well permit an evil soul to go wandering through the universe, slaying at will, as this one has done." He looked about. "Am I under arrest?"

"You are not," said the police magistrate, shortly.

I'm rather cold-blooded. Maybe being a police court reporter has done that. I grumbled something about its being too good a death for the cur. Young Fowler looked at me strangely. Those cold eyes of his bored me through and through. His voice when he spoke was hard and deadly cold—cold as an Arctic night.

"Gentlemen, I believe there is a hell," he said. *"And I believe that the soul of Rolf Jaeke is now bound through the winds of the outer spaces to the farthest corner of hell. Listen!"*

I listened. There was a sound. Was it a wailing? Was it the cry of a soul lost in chaos—an evil soul? A wailing filled with unutterable horror! A lost soul? Or the wind?

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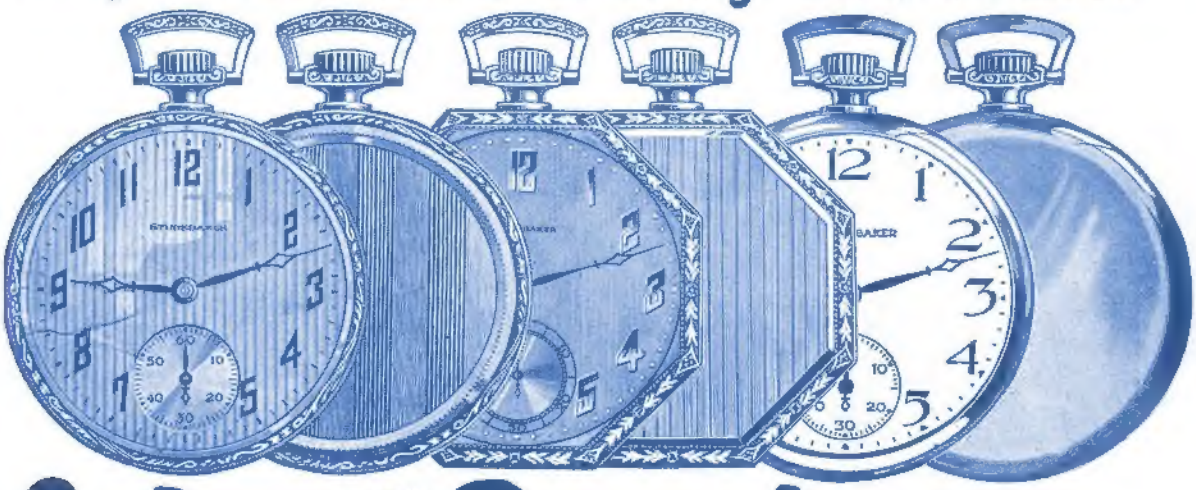

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